



Citation for published version:

James, C, Brammer, S, Connolly, M, Fertig, M, James, J & Jones, J 2010, *The 'hidden givers': a study of school governing bodies in England*. CfBT Education Trust, Reading.

Publication date:
2010

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The 'hidden givers': a study of school governing bodies in England

PROJECT REPORT

Chris James, Steve Brammer,
Michael Connolly, Mike Fertig,
Jane James and Jeff Jones

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

A research project funded
by CfBT Education Trust





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Executive summary

The project analysed the relationship between primary and secondary school governing and school performance and the way this relationship was influenced by the socio-economic setting.

The research was undertaken by a team of researchers from the University of Bath: Chris James (Project Co-Director), Steve Brammer (Project Co-Director), Michael Connolly, Mike Fertig, Jane James and Jeff Jones. The project was funded by CfBT Education Trust.

The project undertook an extensive review of the relevant literature; extended the analysis of data from a national survey of school governors undertaken by Balarin et al. in 2008; and undertook 30 case studies of school governing in England in a range of settings.

The review of the relevant literature. The review identified a number of themes in the literature as follows.

- ***The governance of schools*** – including: the notion of the self-governance of schools; ways of understanding the governance of schools; relevant models of corporate governance; and the responsibilities of governing bodies in general.
- ***Aspects of school governing*** – including: the constitution of school governing bodies; the characteristics of school governors; the recruitment, retention, and capabilities required of school governors, and the benefits of being a school governor; governing body roles and responsibilities, workloads, the typologies of governing bodies, and the tensions in the work of school governing; governance and accountability; and the effectiveness of governing bodies and their impact on school performance.

The analysis of the survey data. The national survey undertaken by Balarin et al. (2008) asked respondents a range of questions under the headings: recruitment, induction and training; the attributes sought in governors; the functioning of the governing body; and the task of governing. There were over 5,000 responses from over 1,000 identifiable schools. These responses were matched with pupil and school level data. The final sample consisted of 545 primary schools and 169 secondary schools. A multi-level analysis was undertaken to establish the relationship between governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment in primary schools and secondary schools in high and low socio-economic settings. The data was also analysed to establish differences



in the nature of primary and secondary school governing with high and low levels of pupil attainment in those different settings.

The case studies of school governing. The project studied governing in 16 primary and 14 secondary schools as individual cases, which varied according to: high and low governing body effectiveness; high and low school performance; and high and low socio-economic status.

In each case, the chair of the governing body, the headteacher and at least one other governor were interviewed and at least one governing body meeting was observed. The interviews explored: aspects of the school and its recent history, especially in relation to governance; all aspects of school governing; and any other relevant matters. Data from individual cases was analysed to identify emergent themes and a cross-case analysis was undertaken.

The findings. The main findings are as follows.

1. School governors give an enormous amount to the education system in England, yet their contribution is largely hidden from public view.
2. The lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence for a school; it is a substantial disadvantage.
3. The chair of the governing body and the chair's relationship with the headteacher are very significant in enabling high quality governance. Being the chair of a school governing body is a significant educational and community leadership responsibility.
4. The role of the local authority governor is unclear and in some ways can be unsatisfactory. There was very little evidence of the responsibility or the link with the authority being used in any productive way.
5. Notions of 'challenging the headteacher' and 'calling the headteacher to account' did not match the practices of the governing bodies studied. The focus tended to be on scrutiny – of information, decisions, plans and policies. The governing task was only rarely described in terms of 'performance'; it was always talked about in terms of the 'school'. Further, that governors support the school was accepted as axiomatic.
6. School governing is important and can be difficult and demanding. It takes place in a range of ways and at various times through informal contacts and meetings, formal meetings, in schools and during particular ad hoc events such as 'away days'.
7. Primary school governing and secondary school governing are different. The level of effectiveness of primary school governing is linked clearly and positively to the level of pupil attainment. The link between secondary school governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment is very weak.
8. The governing of a school and the context for governing are typically in a continual state of flux.



9. Well managed governing as a collective activity based on the stakeholder model is well placed to cope with the changeable nature of both governance and the context for governance.
10. Governing bodies exert a similar effect on pupil attainment in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings.
11. The extent to which the governing body focused on the performance of the school and how performance was considered varied under a range of influences.
12. Governance capital is the network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governing of any particular school. The governance capital available is likely to be greater for schools that: are well regarded compared with those that are not; are in higher socio-economic status settings; and have higher levels of pupil attainment. These effects may add and mutually reinforce the creation of an 'amplifier effect' which may seriously impact on the governing of some schools.
13. The agency for governance is the energy, level of proactivity, drive and commitment to the governing, and for the governing, of any particular school. It is highly significant for all aspects of governing and can ameliorate the effects of low governance capital. The effect of the agency for governance complicates the relationship between governing, performance and socio-economic context.

The findings of the research confirmed that school governing is complicated, demanding, and goes on largely un-noticed. The commitment of many of those we interviewed was quite remarkable especially in terms of the time they gave to their governing responsibilities. Much of the work of lay governors is hidden from view and is all undertaken for no tangible reward. The 300,000 or so school governors in England make a significant contribution to their schools and to the education system as a whole.

The members of the research team would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to all the respondents in the study who gave their time freely and offered their considerable insights very generously, and to CfBT Education Trust for funding the research.

School governing bodies have a very significant role in the governance of the education system in England. Indeed, they are responsible for the conduct of their schools. It is becoming increasingly clear that ensuring 'good school governing' is not particularly straightforward although governors in many instances 'make it work well'. School governing is likely to become even more complicated as a result of:

- increasing expectations of schools
- changes to government policies
- schools becoming more diverse in type, increasingly working together, and being governed together
- schools providing an extended range of services for their communities and undertaking a broader range of responsibilities and tasks
- new forms of schools and the extension of existing categories.

In late 2008, the School Governance Study (Balarin et al., 2008) analysed the policy and research literature relevant to school governing, carried out 43 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, undertook a large-scale random online survey of over 5000 school governors and elicited the views of 42 headteachers. It provided a substantial and comprehensive insight into the current state of school governing regulation and practice in England. The Study confirmed that most governing bodies are operating effectively but that school governing was:

- over-complicated – the task of governing was highly complex
- overloaded – school governing bodies were responsible for too much
- overlooked – schools governing does not receive sufficient attention and recognition.

The Study also recognised that there were significant issues in school governing that related to school phase (primary/secondary); school performance; and the socio-economic context of the school. It was however beyond the scope of the Study to draw any firm conclusions about these factors and their relationship to school governing. So it was to analyse the relationship between these factors that we carried out the research reported here. In so doing, we hoped to take understandings of school governing to a higher level.

The aim of the research was: to analyse the relationship between school governing and school performance and the way this relationship is contingent upon the wider social context within which the school is located and the school type. The research addressed the following research questions.

1. What is the relationship between the different features of school governing and a variety of aspects of school performance?
2. How are relationships between school governing and performance contingent upon the school's socio-economic context?
3. How are relationships between school governing and performance contingent upon school type?

There were two main strands to the research.

1. An analysis of quantitative data relating to governing and school performance, phase, and socio-economic context.
2. The case study of school governing of various levels of effectiveness in schools in different phases with a range of levels of performance and differing socio-economic contexts.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 examines the main themes in the literature on governance and school governing and explores a range of issues relevant to this study. We then present the quantitative analysis of the survey data in Chapter 3 and briefly review the findings to set the ground for the qualitative case study analysis that follows in Chapter 4. In that chapter, we report the outcomes of a cross-case analysis of the governing of 30 schools that were widely dispersed throughout England and displayed a range of levels of performance, governing body effectiveness, and socio-economic status. We explain the sample and the selection of schools for study, describe the data collection and analysis, and set out the main themes that emerged across the data set. At the end of that chapter, we explore a number of substantive issues relevant to the research questions that emerge from the analysis. In Chapter 5, we summarise the key findings and discuss the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analysis. For ease of reading we present the methodology of the project in Appendices 1 and 2.

2

Significant themes in the literature on school governing

2.1

Introduction

There have been a number of publications on school governing that are relevant to this study, some of which are very significant. However, this literature is not as extensive as the literature on other aspects of the leadership and management of schools. The research and policy literature such as it is covers a range of themes as follows.

- The governance of schools, including: the notion of the self-governance of schools; ways of understanding the governance of schools; relevant models of corporate governance; and the responsibilities of governing bodies in general.
- Aspects of school governing, including: the constitution of school governing bodies; the characteristics of school governors; governor recruitment and retention; the capabilities required of school governors; the benefits of being a school governor; governing body roles and responsibilities; the workload of school governors; typologies of governing bodies; tensions in the work of school governing; governance and accountability; and the effectiveness of governing bodies and their impact on school performance.

These issues are addressed in the various sections in this chapter.

2.2

The governance of schools

2.2.1 The self-governance of schools

In the final decade of the twentieth century, there was a major shift to the self-governance of schools in the UK and elsewhere. Although this self-governance has been enacted in diverse ways, the assumption is that “*greater autonomy will lead to improved educational outcomes*” (Bush, 2001 p.39).

The autonomy schools have gained is of course constrained and it is the wider system of governance which exerts that constraint. Thus, a large number of other agencies and institutions also play a part in the governance of schools. The various roles and responsibilities of the different actors, and the interconnections and relationships between them, together create a governance network (Rhodes, 1997; Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009).

2.2.2 Ways of understanding the governance of schools

A governance network is the formal and informal institutional linkages between governmental and other actors that are structured around shared interests in public policy-making and implementation (Rhodes, 2007). These institutions are interdependent and are continually interacting on the basis of trust and agreed rules. Many of the network actors have a degree of independence from the state. Policies come forward from the network. Government departments collaborate with network members in policy development because typically they do not provide services directly and therefore have to rely on the members of the network to do so.

Members of the school governance network are various and the network is extensive, arguably because of the school system's wide-ranging and significant responsibilities. Actors in the school governance network include: teachers, politicians, unions, professional associations, government departments, government agencies, headteachers, local authorities, public companies, voluntary organisations, other non-school educational institutions, members of the wider community and school governors.

The inter-connected nature of governance networks requires analytical perspectives grounded in a conception of governance different from the customary view that governance is solely the province of governors. One such perspective is interactive governance (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009) which is:

"The whole of interactions instigated to solve societal problems and to create societal opportunities; including the formulation and application of principles guiding those interactions and care for institutions that enable or control them" (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009 p 820).

Interactive governance provides a useful analytical frame which comprises:

- orders – the central concerns and interests of governance at the various levels in the system
- modes – the ways of and arrangements for governing such as hierarchical, self- and co-governance
- elements – the images, instruments and actions that constitute practice.

Orders of governance. There are three inter-related orders of governance.

1. The first order of governance *"deals with the day-to-day affairs"* (Kooiman and Jentoft 2009, p 822). In the governance of the school system, first order governing is the responsibility of headteachers and other school managers, though other actors, for example trade union officials and teachers, could also engage in governing of this order.

2. The second order of governance “*focuses on the institutional arrangements within which first order governing takes place*” (Kooiman and Jentoft 2009, p 822). The work of school governing bodies would be located in this order although of course other actors will have a role, for example the local authority and professional bodies. Moreover, almost all headteachers are members of their school’s governing body.
3. The third order of governance “*involves the organisation of the conditions for governance in its broadest sense*” (Jessop 2003, p 107) and is the province of policy makers, typically in central government.

The modes of governance. School governing is hierarchical because school governing bodies:

- are responsible for the conduct of the school
- delegate powers to their headteachers
- are required to call the headteacher to account (*A Guide to the Law for School Governors*, 2009).

But school governing is also co-governance where “*societal parties join hands with a common purpose in mind*” (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009 p 823) because headteachers and other members of the staff are governors. We discuss below models of corporate governance which have a clear link with Kooiman and Jentoft’s governance modes.

The elements. In the interactive governance model, the elements can be used to characterise governing activities (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009). Thus the governance work of governing bodies can be analysed through:

- images, which constitute “*the guiding lights*” (p. 820) that underpin school governing activities and their rationales. What are the beliefs, knowledge in different forms, metaphors, assumptions, aims and purposes on which governing is based?
- instruments, which mediate between images and actions. What are the influences on the design, choice and application of instruments?
- governing actions, where the instruments are put into effect. What are the mundane actions required to implement policies? How are other actors motivated and mobilised to create new opportunities and effect social change?

2.2.3 Models of corporate governance

In this section, we discuss some of the models of corporate governance that are relevant to this study.

The principal-agent model is the dominant model of organisational governance. It originates from the ‘professionalisation’ of management and the consequent division between ‘ownership’ and ‘operational control’, and the potential conflicts of interest

that may arise from such arrangements. Alternative perspectives on corporate governance have emerged as a result of the limitations of the principal-agent model. Two are relevant to governing in schools: stewardship and stakeholder models. The three models are as follows.

The principal-agent model. This model formally recognises that the owners of companies, the shareholders or 'principals', are often separate from the managers of the company, the 'agents'. Company managers are seen to have an informational advantage over the owners because of this arrangement. Moreover, managers are assumed to act in their own interests, which may not necessarily accord with those of the principals. The 'manager in the mind' of the principals is one who is:

- eager to take advantage when the circumstances arise
- likely to act in her/his own best interests when circumstances permit
- not be naturally motivated to act in the company's best interests.

From this perspective, the primary goal of 'good governance' is to reduce the degree of imbalance of information between the manager and the board and to control the manager. The board thus has a monitoring role. It receives reports from managers, and establishes internal systems of accountability and reporting in order that the board (the principals) can control the operational management. The principal-agent model is a form of hierarchical governance.

In the principal-agent model, the board is to some degree at least independent of operational management so it can undertake the monitoring role. Boards may be eager to align the incentives of the agents with those of principals to encourage the agents to act in the principals' interests. The design and implementation of remuneration packages are likely to be important in aligning the interests of the board (the owners/principals) and the managers (agents). In a pure principal-agent model, the managers would not be members of the board. Such an arrangement would blur the principal-agent boundary.

The stewardship model. This model is often contrasted with principal-agent models largely on the basis of the very different sense of the 'manager in the mind'. This perspective on the manager conditions the assumptions on which this model is based. In the stewardship model, the manager is seen as:

- ready to act in the common good
- co-operative
- motivated to act wholeheartedly to meet the organisation's objectives.

Financial incentives are thus likely to be less important as motivators to encourage the alignment between the objectives of the manager and the board. Managers want to run the organisation effectively and the interests of managers and owners are naturally aligned. Managers may possess knowledge superior to that of the board but that is of little consequence in practice. It is assumed they will use this knowledge to the benefit of the corporation.

In the stewardship model, the board's role is to empower the management and to collaborate with it. The board is essentially facilitative and seeks to collaborate with the operational managers in taking actions that are in the corporation's best interests. Remuneration arrangements typically reward performance rather than incentivise it. The board will typically comprise experts who are able to work jointly with the management to enhance decision quality. If the corporation's managers were members of the board, it would not be at odds with the underpinning principles of this arrangement.

The stakeholder model. This model comes into play when a range of players have an interest or stake in the organisation and these different interests need to be recognised in the constitution of the board. The stakeholder 'representatives' may be elected or nominated by the existing board. The board has a role in balancing stakeholder needs and making appropriate policies and strategic decisions.

Under the stakeholder model, the relationship with the manager can be either of the principal-agent kind or of the stewardship kind. It would be contingent on the way the manager was viewed, the alignment of the managers and the board, and the concern about any asymmetries in the knowledge of the managers and that of the board.

2.2.4 The responsibilities of governing bodies in general

A governing body, for example a corporate board or a board of trustees, is likely to have a wide range of responsibilities which vary according to the context of the organisation it governs. There is thus no generally agreed statement about the responsibilities of governing bodies that are applicable in every instance. However, governing bodies are generally responsible for:

- determining and/or evaluating an organisation's strategy
- monitoring and assessing the extent to which that strategy is successfully implemented
- ensuring or helping to ensure that sufficient resources are in place for strategy implementation to occur.

The UK's Combined Code of Corporate Governance (FSA, 2003) is often taken as an exemplar for the responsibilities of corporate boards. It specifies the responsibilities of corporate boards as follows.

"To set the company's strategic aims, ensure that the necessary financial and human resources are in place for the company to meet its objectives and review management performance. The board should set the company's values and standards and ensure that its obligations to its shareholders and others are understood and met" (FSA 2003 p. 4).

Similarly, Mintzberg (1983), drawing on a range of research and policy literature, sets out seven responsibilities of a governing board as follows.

1. Selecting the chief executive officer
2. Exercising direct control during periods of crisis
3. Reviewing managerial decisions and performance
4. Co-opting external influences
5. Establishing contacts (and raising funds) for the organisation
6. Enhancing the organisation's reputation
7. Giving advice to the organisation

These responsibilities reflect the two main purposes of governance: ensuring institutional legitimacy and effectiveness. The responsibilities of governing boards of the public and third sector organisations generally emphasise the supervision aspect of governance over the more operational matters. Interestingly though, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' code of good governance (NCVO, 2005) identifies 12 key board responsibilities, many of which are quite operationally-oriented. However, the general sense of 'governing' conveyed in the responsibilities relates to oversight as opposed to involvement in day-to-day operational matters.

2.2.5 Aspects of school governing

The constitution of school governing bodies

The way school governing bodies in England are constituted, that is, who the members are, is grounded in changes initiated in the 1970s. At that time, concern was expressed largely but not exclusively by those on the political right, about the cost and quality of schools and whether schools were meeting society's needs. The 'educational establishment' was felt to be in control of the system. As a result, it was suffering from 'provider capture' (Lauder, 1991) where the providers of a service control all aspects of it.

During the 1970s, the education system, the curriculum, and particular teaching methods were extensively and openly criticised; see for example, Cox and Dyson (1971). Wider public involvement in the education system was considered to be a way of responding to those concerns. This involvement was enabled by the *1980 Education Act* and the *1986 Education (No 2) Act*, which required governing bodies to have parent, community and business representation. These changes ushered in a substantial change in school governance which has remained in place since.

The principle of ensuring parent, community and business participation in school governing is reflected in the current statutory arrangements. The *2002 Education Act* introduced a flexible and de-regulated system for the constitution of governing bodies to enhance accountability and democratic participation. The *School Governance Constitution* regulations (DfES, 2003b) enabled the inclusion of:

- parent, staff, community and local authority governors
- foundation governors from the school's founding body
- partnership and sponsor governors from the wider (typically business) community
- associate (non-voting) members.

The headteacher may choose to be a governing body member and typically does so. No other member is directly remunerated, apart from the clerk, who may be paid.

The School Governance (Constitution) (England Regulations 2007) (DfES, 2007) frame the current constitution of governing bodies. They allow every school to specify its governing body size between the limits of nine and 20 governors. They also continue the policy of requiring wide stakeholder involvement in the governing of all schools including trusts, academies and school federations. The maximum term for all governors is four years. However, governors may be re-elected and governors may change their designation.

Representation achieves the so-called democratising rationale for the way school governing is constituted (Dean et al., 2007). A number of theorists have supported and advocated this long-standing rationale. Ranson et al. (2005b) for example, argue that stakeholder involvement gives groups with an interest in the school a voice in its conduct. Moreover, participation can strengthen the legitimacy of institutions in the public sphere such as schools. Governors who are representative of particular constituencies, such as parent governors, are neither obliged nor expected to obtain mandates for their governing body decisions. Arguably, the notion of representation serves an inclusion purpose, which can potentially enhance community participation in the work of schools, contribute to community cohesion, and help to sustain a cosmopolitan civil society (Ranson, 2008b). Further, given the developmental benefits of participation in school governing (Punter, Adams and Kraithman, 2007), wider inclusion could promote community development.

Achieving representation may be difficult (Ranson et al. 2005). However, when parental participation is achieved it can have a positive democratising impact with volunteers tending to move from specific concerns about their own children in the school, to a more general preoccupation for “*the needs of the institution and the wider community*” (Ranson et al., 2005 p.361).

The representation purpose of the way governing bodies are constituted is in tension with the requirement to ensure that the governing body has the skills required for effective working (Balarin et al., 2008). The skills required may not be available within the pools of potential governors from different constituencies and presents a dilemma. Within that dilemma is a further quandary about which skills are important. The way these representation-skill dilemmas are resolved has implications for governor recruitment, induction and training; governing body size; and the management of vacancies on the governing body.

The characteristics of school governors

Studies of the general characteristics of school governors present a perhaps unsurprising picture. A national survey of governors by Scanlon et al. in 1999 identified the following characteristics.

- Nearly 40% of lay governors had had experience of an education-related occupation.

- Most governors were employed, and 26% of chairs and 13% of governors were retired.
- 83% were in professional or managerial occupations.
- Over one third were graduates.
- One in eight had a higher degree.
- About a quarter of chairs were professionally qualified.

A study of governors of 19 schools in five areas of the UK (Ranson et al., 2005a) found that governors were generally white, middle aged, middle class, middle income public/community service workers. However, the study identified considerable variation across the different areas. In disadvantaged areas, governors from minority ethnic groups tend to be under-represented on governing bodies of schools (Dean et al., 2007). Other research has indicated a concern amongst headteachers about the lack of diversity in the composition of governing bodies (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). In some schools in disadvantaged areas, between a quarter and a half of the members of the governing body live outside their school's immediate locality (Dean et al., 2007). This finding is interesting given the stress that headteachers appear to give to governing bodies being representative of their local communities (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

The findings of research into the composition of governing bodies in terms of ethnicity, class and place of residence of governing bodies are important. However, the key issue is what members of a governing body individually and collectively do as school governors and why, rather than who they are.

Recruitment to governing bodies

Lay members of school governing bodies, that is, those not employed by the school such as the headteacher and other members of the teaching staff, participate on a voluntary basis. Indeed, lay governors constitute one of the largest voluntary groups in the country.

Barriers to volunteering for school governing include the following:

- a lack of time or competing time commitments
- the cost of taking part in terms of lack of reimbursement
- the lack of publicity given to school governing
- a lack of confidence and self-esteem amongst potential volunteers
- negative feelings arising from potential volunteers' own experience of school
- the perceived attitude of existing governors
- the barrier created by the recruitment process
- accessibility – access for people who are disabled, and lack of transport (Ellis, 2003).

Participation in a voluntary activity, such as school governing, requires the motivation, capability and opportunity to participate (Balarin et al., 2008). These factors interact and are conditioned by a further range of internal and external factors. For example, the parent of a child at a particular school, for example in a disadvantaged area, may be persuaded by a chair of a governing body that they have the potential to develop the capability to be a governor, and that they should consider becoming a governor.

Governors have a four-year term of office, so there is likely to be a constant turnover of governors. New and perhaps inexperienced governors may join a governing body, some may leave after one or perhaps more terms of office, and some may continue after their four years have lapsed. Thus, for any governing body, filling vacancies is likely to be a continual concern and the pattern of vacancies will vary over time (Balarin et al., 2008).

There are trends in the pattern of vacancies nationally despite the individual and varied pattern of vacancies for any one governing body (Bowen, 2007). The overall level of vacancies runs at about 11% with the highest levels being for community governors (15%) and sponsor governors (22%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the level of teacher vacancies is relatively low at 6%. Governing bodies in London and in unitary authorities tend to have the highest level of vacancies but the variation overall is small. Bowen's (2007) study also found that the level of vacancies had increased very slightly between 2002 and 2007.

Balarin et al. (2008) report that the matter of governor vacancies may be more complex than the data reported by Bowen (2007) suggests. They found that governing bodies with a high level of vacancies, for example 25%, at the end of one school term may have no vacancies at the end of the next because the vacancies had been filled. The vacancy picture is therefore not static. Nonetheless, they report that there may be a 'hard core' of 2 – 3% of schools that persistently have high vacancy rates, which is a total of between 500 and 750 schools.

The national survey by Balarin et al. (2008) of over 5000 governors showed that only 33.6% of respondents reported they generally found it very easy to find suitable people for their governing body. Moreover, 45.1% found identifying willing governors with the right skills very challenging. Balarin et al. (2008) argue that it is likely that persistently high levels of vacancies and high turnover will result in governing bodies being less effective. That argument is borne out to some extent by their data although the pattern is not clear. It might be expected that the more effective governing bodies, perhaps those which manage the tensions and dilemmas of governing well, also manage their vacancies competently and may therefore have a lower level of vacancies. The Balarin et al. (2008) data supports this argument although again the pattern is not clear. 89% of governors in the bottom quartile for vacancy rates (that is, with least vacancies) reported that their governing body works very effectively, as against 82% of those in the top quartile (highest level) of vacancy rates. Those governing bodies in the bottom vacancy rate quartile scored more highly on various measures of effective working than

those in the top quartile. Although the differences are small, they are nonetheless consistent (Balarin et al., 2008).

School governor retention

There are significant benefits to retaining capable school governors. However, it has to be said that there are also benefits from the continual turnover of governing body membership. Governors are likely to remain in post if they feel valued (Adams and Punter, 2007; Punter, Adams and Kraithman, 2007; Punter and Adams, 2008a; 2008b). The main factors that make governors feel valued and want to stay in post are:

- being welcomed and accepted by the headteacher and by fellow governors
- being invited to use their skills.

The aspects that discourage governors and are thus threats to governor retention are:

- exasperation at the inadequate level and complexity of school funding
- frustration about the local authority
- irritation about central government policies.

Aspects of school governing that made it worthwhile are:

- involvement in the life of the school
- working with and supporting staff
- being part of, and celebrating, the school's success
- making a difference and seeing children benefit
- advocacy on behalf of the school
- their own development
- using skills acquired elsewhere to benefit children
- supporting and coaching other governors (Phillips and Fuller, 2003).

Those aspects that are least worthwhile are:

- the amount and complexity of the paperwork
- an unrealistic workload and responsibilities
- inadequate support for governing bodies
- central government interference
- problems with the local authority, central government and private contractors
- budgetary unfairness (Phillips and Fuller, 2003).

The overall picture is that governors want to be valued and welcomed and to undertake work for the governing body and the school. They also enjoy being associated with successful schools and seeing children benefit. All these factors are motivators. Factors that lead to dissatisfaction appear to come under the headings of workload, complexity, dealings with outside agencies and financial problems. These factors are dissatisfiers. Balarin et al. (2008) argue that both ensuring that the

motivators are present and removing or reducing the effect of the dissatisfiers is likely to enhance governor recruitment and retention.

The capabilities required of school governors

Governors consider the requirement of new or potential governors to support the ethos of the school to be the most important attribute of new governors (Balarin et al., 2008). The ability to support the school ethos and having relevant skills, functional and strategic capabilities and specialist expertise are more important than community representation. Governors with functional/operational skills, such as financial or human resource management, are often welcomed onto governing bodies because those skills may be of value in ensuring the effective operation of the school. However, those skills may not be so useful in calling the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school or acting as a critical friend to the headteacher. Both of these responsibilities are cited as key governing body functions in policy documents and by the school governing experts that Balarin et al. (2008) interviewed.

Recruiting governors because of their functional skills may suggest that they have operational responsibility, which is not part of the governors' remit. Indeed, arguably such skills should be available to the school from other sources. Balarin et al. (2008) report that governors who were appointed for their functional expertise typically developed governing capabilities during their tenure.

Whether the capabilities required for effective governing can be acquired easily or within the four-year tenure period is open to debate. Moreover, the skills developed during a four-year period are likely to be shaped, perhaps unhelpfully, by governing body custom and practice.

The notion of supporting the ethos of the school was a powerful guiding image for governing bodies in deciding who should become members of the governing body (Balarin et al., 2008). Functional capabilities such as finance or human resources were not highly valued by governing experts, who emphasised the importance of strategic capability, which for them included being able to call the headteacher to account (Balarin et al., 2008).

Balarin et al. (2008) reported that the respondents to their national survey who considered that their governing bodies were effective thought that a wide range of characteristics were important, compared with those who thought their governing bodies were ineffective. One interpretation of this finding is that effective governing bodies consider they require and probably therefore seek a wide set of skills to maintain the effectiveness of their actions.

The benefits of being a school governor

The benefits from volunteering to be a school governor include:

- a sense of satisfaction
- a feeling of pride – presumably from involvement in governing a successful school
- the development of new skills, friendships and networking opportunities

- personal development
- for some, enhanced employment prospects (Ellis, 2003).

The new capabilities developed by participation in governing include:

- understanding finance
- knowledge about education
- increased social awareness (Punter, Adams and Kraithman, 2007).

Governors who work in less senior management positions reported having developed a range of personal and interpersonal skills that they felt would prepare them for more senior roles in their work (Punter, Adams and Kraithman, 2007). Involvement in school governing can be “*a life enhancing experience*” (p.6), a finding which mirrors the findings of Ellis (2003).

The responsibilities of school governing bodies

In the last 20 years, attempts in statute and guidance to clarify the tasks and responsibilities of school governing bodies have led to a large number of definitions and specifications.

The *1988 Education Reform Act* made governing bodies responsible for the conduct of their schools. This duty was subsequently confirmed by the *1998 Standards and Framework Act* and the *2002 Education Act*. The *1988 Education Reform Act* stated that governing bodies’ responsibilities encompassed:

- school administration
- strategic planning
- accountability
- staff appointment and dismissal.

The *1998 Standards and Framework Act* specified the tasks as:

- setting strategic directions
- supporting or challenging schools
- acting as ‘critical friends’ by monitoring and evaluating schools’ progress.

Regulations published in 2000 (Statutory Instrument, 2000) also emphasised the strategic responsibility of the governing body. The headteacher may advise the governing body on strategy, aims, objectives, policies and targets. However, the governing body sets them and monitors and evaluates the strategic progress of the school. The regulations also confirmed the governing body in the role of ‘critical friend’ to the headteacher, giving support and constructive criticism.

In 2002, Ofsted sought to clarify the central responsibilities as:

- strategic direction
- critical friendship
- accountability.

The *2002 Education Act* stipulated that governing bodies:

- set the school's vision and strategic aims
- monitor and evaluate performance
- approve the school's budget
- ensure the school is accountable to those it serves
- appoint the headteacher
- act as a critical friend by providing support and challenge.

The most recent attempt to clarify the responsibility of the governing body was set out in the 2009 Education White Paper *'Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future: Building a 21st Century School System'* (DCSF, 2009a). The responsibilities were defined as *"holding the school's leadership to account for the performance of the school"* (p13). The White Paper promised to make clear in legislation that:

"A key responsibility (our emphasis) of the governors of the school is to hold the leadership of the school to account for the effectiveness of its service . . . and the standard of education provided" (p48).

The central tasks of governing bodies are stated as:

"Providing effective challenge and support, (and) holding to account, (and) making effective use of data and information to manage performance and ensuring value for money" (p13).

The last two tasks, relating to the use of data and ensuring value for money, had not previously featured in legislation or guidance.

School governing bodies are at the heart of an accountability regime that has grown in intensity over time. Ranson (2008b) charts the intensification of the school accountability through various eras:

- trusting the professionals and their expertise, which was dominant till the late 1970s
- market accountability, which was central from the early 1980s
- contractual accountability and legal regulation, which prevailed from the early 1990s
- performance and audit-based accountability, which has been influential since the early 1990s.

The long-established governing body responsibility for the conduct of schools, together with the accountability responsibility, was re-stated in recent policy proposals (DCSF, 2009a).

Importantly, although different forms of accountability have been dominant at various times, they have all been carried forward to the present. There has thus been an accretion of governing body accountabilities, and the main modes of accountability over the last 30 years all feature in the way school governing is currently constructed. Arguably, any calls for school governing bodies to exert greater accountability demands on headteachers shift school governing towards a principal-agent model.

In addition to the wide range of governing body tasks and responsibilities specified in statute and guidance, the regulations frequently draw the governing body into an operational role. Section 21 of the 2002 *Education Act* states that:

“The conduct of a maintained school shall be under the direction (our emphasis) of the school’s governing body (and that) the governing body shall conduct the school (our emphasis) with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school.”

This specification appears to assign to governing bodies a responsibility for managing and leading (directing and conducting) a school’s teachers and the pupils. Similarly, *A New Relationship with Schools* (Ofsted/DfES, 2005) states that:

“The overall purpose of governing bodies is to help the schools they lead (our emphasis) provide the best possible education for pupils.”

Likewise, *Governing the School of the Future* (DfES, 2004 para 12) assigns a number of operational tasks, such as making creative use of resources, establishing “a strategic framework for leadership development” and championing “continuous professional development for all school staff”, to the governing body. As discussed earlier, the resolution of the strategic-operational dilemma is significant in the construction of school governing.

Arguably, clarifying the governing body responsibilities that are operational and those that are strategic would be helped by delineating which tasks are those of the headteacher and the staff and which were the governing body’s. However, this distinction is not made clear in statute or in the guidance given to governors. The extent of the delegation of responsibility for the management of aspects of the school’s conduct is for the governing body to decide (*A Guide to the Law for School Governors*, 2009).

The way the tasks and responsibilities of governing bodies are specified and the scope for variation in assigning them place a particular burden of duty on the governing body clerk. *The Governors’ Guide to the Law* (DCSF, 2009b) makes clear that the clerk needs to work effectively with the governing body and the headteacher to support the governing body and be able to advise the governing body on constitutional and procedural matters, duties and powers.

Many governors feel a heavy burden of responsibilities and that they can delegate these responsibilities to only a limited extent (Phillips and Fuller, 2003). Thus for example, Phillips and Fuller (2003) report that half the respondents in their survey felt that they should be responsible for drawing up the staff performance management policy. Further, about a third felt that they should be responsible for making sure parents receive a report on their child’s progress. Overall, they see their responsibility as one of “being guardians or trustees of children’s education” (p. 8).

The roles of governing bodies

The research evidence indicates that governing bodies can function in a variety of ways and take up a range of different roles. Headteachers and senior staff value the governing body in the following roles:

- a critical and informed sounding board for the headteacher
- a support for the school
- a help breaking down the isolation of the headteacher
- a link with parents and the community
- a provider of direction and vision for the school in partnership with the staff
- a forum within which the teachers can explain their work
- a provider of a range of non-educational expertise and experience (Scanlon et al., 1999).

As with other studies, Ranson et al. (2005b) highlight the considerable variation among governing bodies and the way they work, which makes generalisations about their roles difficult.

Farrell (2005) reports that governors rarely take up the role of challenging the headteacher or changing headteachers' decisions. At the same time, the role of the headteacher is often that of persuading governors to accept their proposals. She argues that they are rarely involved in shaping school strategies although chairs of governing bodies (ChGBs), who tend to work more closely with headteachers, may be involved in this way. Farrell concludes that the main reasons for this lack of involvement in strategy are that governors tend to focus on their areas of specialism, such as finance and accounting. They then take on more specific tasks rather than thinking in strategic terms. The organisation of governing bodies into committees with specific responsibilities may strengthen this tendency.

Farrell (2005) also asserts that, while policies have empowered governors in a strategic role, the number of specific regulations that have been issued and that have accumulated over the years hinder governors' involvement in strategy. This point echoes that made by Earley (2003) who asserts that:

"It is not always easy for school governing bodies (or boards of non-executive directors) to operate strategically . . . they feel more comfortable giving support and offering advice than they do in helping to decide the school's strategy and direction" (p. 364).

This view is supported by Dean et al. (2007) who report that governors in their study *"felt happier offering support rather than challenge, and relied on heads to set strategic direction for the school."*

The workload of school governors

Research on the workload of governing bodies reports a complex picture (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007; Ranson et al., 2005a). However, the overall message is relatively clear: governors have a high workload and show considerable commitment. Governing bodies tend to have a core of members who attend meetings

regularly, give extensive hours to the governing body's work and take responsibility for chairing the governing body or committees of the governing body (Ranson et al., 2005a). Governors on the whole cope with the demands of participation. Only one in seven viewed the workload and its complexities and the responsibilities and powers as unacceptable (Ranson et al., 2005a). However, the workload can fall heavily on a small number of members of the governing body. A recent study of volunteering (City of London, 2010) reports that school governing can be one of the most demanding forms of voluntary work in education.

Typologies of governing bodies

Various typologies of governing bodies have emerged from studies of their structure and functioning.

Kogan et al. (1984) based their typology on models of authority and proposed 'accountable', 'advisory', 'supportive' and 'mediator'. The typology developed by Creese and Earley (1999) is founded on the nature of the governor-staff relationship. Their typology distinguishes between 'abdicators', 'adversaries', 'supporters clubs' and 'partners'. It is based on the extent of support and challenge in the relationship between the governors and the staff.

More recently, Ranson et al. (2005a) developed a typology based on the power relationship between the headteacher and the ChGB and the extent of corporateness of the governing body in its deliberations. They distinguish four types of governing body.

1. **A deliberative forum** – where discussions of the school are determined and led by the headteacher. Governors, especially parent governors, will not feel they can question the authority of the headteacher.
2. **A consultative sounding board** – where the headteacher brings policies and strategies to the governing body for consent and authorisation. Governors authorise decisions but have little role in, or responsibility for, shaping them. There will be discussion but the headteacher decides.
3. **An executive board** – where there is a partnership between the governors and the school and especially between the headteacher and the chair. There *"may be a division of labour."* Governors have *"overall responsibility for the business aspects of the school: the budget, staffing, and the infrastructure of the building."* The headteacher assumes *"overall responsibility for curricular and pedagogic aspects of the school."* In this type, *"there is likely to be a strong structure of subcommittees with considerable delegation of responsibility"* (p. 311).
4. **A governing body** – where headteachers maintain strong leadership, but are seen as *"members rather than leaders of the governing body that acts as a corporate entity"*. ChGBs have the main role in agenda setting and leading meetings. The governing body *"takes overarching responsibility for the conduct and direction of the school"* (p. 311).

Different combinations of these types tend to determine whether the governing body is merely a space for disseminating information about the school to the different stakeholders and a way of keeping stakeholders informed, or whether and to what extent it has a role in school decision-making.

Importantly, Ranson et al. (2005a) found that the deliberative forum and the consultative sounding board were predominant, although the sample of governing bodies was relatively small, was not constructed on a random basis, and the research was undertaken in Wales where different governance arrangements apply.

A factor contributing to the variation in governing body roles may well be the relationship between the headteacher and the governing body and the degree to which they share the leadership function (Earley, 2003).

Tensions in the work of school governing

The review by Balarin et al. (2008) revealed four main tensions in the responsibilities of school governing bodies and the way they function.

1. **Support-challenge.** The roles of providing support and challenge have been specified in policy, for example the 2002 Education Act, and guidance on school governing. However, the relationship between the two is complex and ensuring an appropriate balance is difficult. Governors have to understand exactly what is meant by support and challenge as well as managing the two dimensions appropriately.
2. **Representation-skill.** There is a tension between ensuring the representation of different stakeholder groups and making sure the governing body has the capability required. Representation is important and indeed obligatory. It ensures that the various stakeholder groups have a voice in the conduct of the school. However, governors and the governing body require certain skills and qualities which may not be present in members of the stakeholder groups who are willing to become governors.
3. **Operational-strategic.** Governance is essentially a strategic responsibility and the governing body should take on that strategic role. The governing body may be drawn into operational matters as part of their governing work. Governors may engage in the life of the school in a range of ways and many do so. That involvement does not necessarily detract from them acting in a strategic way as governors. Indeed, it may inform their strategic role. The way the responsibilities of governing bodies are set out does not necessarily help governing bodies to retain a strategic role.
4. **Managing-scrutiny.** School governing bodies are legally responsible for the conduct of their schools. Managing is often defined as being responsible for a system. Their responsibility may encourage them to become involved in actively managing, that is 'organising', the school. Undertaking a scrutinising approach is consistent with governing as 'taking responsibility'. However it is not consistent with managing as actively organising.

Governance and accountability

One of the key concerns in governance is accountability, which defines a relationship of formalised control between parties one of whom has the authority to hold the other to account for what they do. Such 'calling to account' typically includes an evaluation of what has been done in relation to the required standards. To be accountable usually carries with it a sense of being responsible for something and answerable to another for the discharging of that responsibility. School governing bodies are required to call the headteacher to account.

Balarin et al. (2008), draw the following conclusions about accountability in relation to school governing.

- In education, that idea of accountability is somewhat problematic. The lines of answerability are not simple or straightforward. Indeed they are very complicated.
- 'Market forces' in terms of the numbers of pupils wishing to join a school – subscription – exert a powerful accountability pressure on schools.
- Schools are subject to internal and external forms of accountability. Internal forms are:
 - the sense of responsibility that individuals in a school feel
 - the collective expectations of school members (including governors)
 - the formal and informal accountability systems.

External forms of accountability are the constraints and demands placed on schools represented by the performance measures which schools are expected to meet and improve upon; and by conformance to the requirements of Ofsted.

- The intensification of accountability that schools have experienced has had some arguably undesirable side-effects. These include a distortion of educational practices to ensure performance is demonstrated. This distortion may have eroded trust and confidence in the school system. It may also have limited the scope for communities – perhaps through their school governing bodies – to deliberate on 'the kind of school we want'. Further, the intensification of accountability does not appear to have been totally successful because a number of schools continue to under-perform.

The effectiveness of governing bodies

Ofsted data provides the broadest picture of the effectiveness of school governing (Balarin et al., 2008). It shows that school governing is good or better in most schools and satisfactory in all but a small minority. This pattern is more or less consistent, with a small overall improvement during the last ten years.

Balarin et al. (2008), following their large-scale national survey of governors, report that effective governing bodies:

- share a common vision of what the school is trying to achieve
- are well attended
- have good communication
- work to a clearly structured agenda
- are effectively chaired
- have meetings where members feel able to speak their minds
- are supplied with good quality, relevant information.

Those governing bodies reported as being ineffective may:

- not receive good quality and relevant information
- be poorly attended
- be inadequately chaired.

In addition, the members may not:

- work well together
- communicate with each other well
- share a common vision
- feel able to speak their minds on particular issues.

Importantly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, effective governing bodies are more likely than ineffective ones to periodically review how they are working (Balarin et al., 2008).

The importance of the role of the clerk in ensuring the effective working processes of the governing body is borne out by research (Balarin et al., 2008) but the influence is not as strong as might be expected. Clerks make a stronger contribution in effective governing bodies (Balarin et al., 2008).

A study undertaken by Ofsted in 2002 reported that generally, governance is less effective in schools in disadvantaged settings, based on the proportion of pupils taking free school meals, than other schools (Ofsted, 2002). Governing body structure and operation varies considerably in disadvantaged areas (Dean et al., 2007).

The impact of school governance on school performance

Data which demonstrates that good governing has a direct effect on school performance is lacking. However, a number of studies have shown a close association between the quality of governing and school performance.

Scanlon et al. (1999) found a strong association between inspection assessments of a school's effectiveness and the assessment of its governing body. They compared two groups of schools, one judged to be very effective by Ofsted and the other less effective with both controlled for contextual factors. There was a distinction between the effectiveness of the governing bodies of the two types of school. A study by Ofsted (2002) showed a similar association.

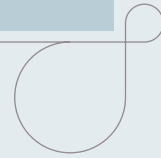
Ranson et al. (2005a), albeit in a small-scale study, showed an association between performance and the type of governing body. The 'executive board' and 'governing body' types were more closely associated with higher performance. Such governing bodies exercise functions of scrutiny, strategy and accountability. Ranson et al. (2005a) argue that scrutiny is the main strategic function of the best primary school governing bodies which they consider to be:

- assuring quality and standards of education in the school by bringing high expectations
- ensuring full deliberation and questioning of policies, budgets and practices
- putting systems in place for monitoring and reviewing the standards of achievement, financial plans and the policy developments in the school.

It is very likely that such practices will lead to improvements in school performance, even though demonstrating a causal effect is difficult.

Ranson et al. (2005a) report that the following features of governing are associated with the improvement of primary schools:

- governing and governance are valued
- the governing body represents the diversity of its parent communities
- partnership between the headteacher and the governors is characterised by mutual support
- there is clarity of roles
- the governing body functions as such or as an executive board
- scrutiny is the strategic function of the best primary school governing bodies
- the governing body assures the quality and standards of education in the school
- it embodies the values and ethos of the school
- there is close attachment of governors to the life of the school
- there are close ties with the community.



3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present the analysis of the quantitative data. There are two sections.

1. A synopsis of the methods used to analyse the quantitative data. The detail of the methodology is given in Appendix 1.
2. A description of the outcomes of the analysis of the survey data from the study undertaken by Balarin et al. (2008). Their data is analysed in relation to primary and secondary schools, educational outcomes, and the socio-economic status of the schools. Where there are significant differences or interesting similarities we offer an interpretation of the findings.

3.2 The methods

The questionnaire-based survey data was collected in 2008 by a national web-based survey of school governors (Balarin et al., 2008). The questions in the survey related to:

- recruitment, induction and training
- attributes sought by governors
- the functioning of governing bodies
- the tasks of governing.

The questions in the questionnaire are given in Appendix 1.

Over 5,000 serving school governors answered at least some of the survey questions, with over 3,500 answering most questions and 3,183 governors giving complete responses. A preliminary analysis of that data was undertaken and has been reported (Balarin et al., 2008).

We used the national pupil level database and the Ofsted inspection report database to analyse that data further, particularly in relation to primary and secondary schools; high and low school performance; and high and low socio-economic status.

The cleaning of the survey data yielded:

- 731 responses in total
- 545 from primary schools and 186 secondary schools
- 362 from high attainment schools and 369 from low attainment schools
- 155 from low socio-economic status (SES) schools and 576 from high SES schools.

Statistically significant differences were identified and are reported in the following section. In addition, we undertook multi-level analyses to identify relationships between governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment (see Appendix 1).

3.3

The outcomes of the analysis of the survey data

In this part, we outline the outcomes of the analysis of the survey data. We focus on the statistically significant differences between governing in primary and secondary schools, governing in high and low attainment schools, and governing in high and low SES schools in order to contrast governing in those settings. In some instances, we report interesting similarities. We offer an interpretation of the findings we report in order to begin to build a picture of school governing in different settings. In some instances, these interpretations relate to the outcomes of the case study analysis presented in Chapter 4.

3.3.1 Governing in primary and secondary schools

Recruitment, induction and training

The requirement to participate in an induction process and the mentoring of new governors are more prevalent in primary school governing bodies.

This finding may be because parent members of primary governing bodies are likely to be less experienced in governing and may therefore require this kind of initial development.

Participation in training is more likely by governors of primary schools.

One explanation of this finding is that primary school governors are likely to be inexperienced in governing and may therefore have a greater need for training and development. Their motivation to undertake training may be higher.

The recommendation by the headteacher is more influential in terms of the attributes sought by primary school governing bodies. Headteachers may be more familiar with the attributes required of governors more clearly than the rest of

the governing body especially in terms of the skills required. They seek capabilities to complement their own (which was the strategy of one primary headteacher we interviewed during the case study data collection).

Governing body task

Secondary school governors are more likely to describe the task of governing as:

1. *monitoring plans and targets*
2. *carrying out a scrutiny role*
3. *being a source of information about business, industry and careers*
4. *collaboration with other community institutions including schools.*

The priority given to tasks 1 and 2 points to the more 'long-distance' way secondary schools are governed, as opposed to the closer involvement that was a characteristic of primary school governing in the case studies (see Chapter 4). Task 3 may be explained by the age range of secondary school pupils. Task 4 may relate to the size of the institution, the links with other institutions for curricular provision, and the greater likelihood of more collaborative links with other institutions including further education colleges and primary schools.

Governors of primary schools are more likely than those of secondary schools to see the task of governing as carrying out operational tasks. This finding may be because the task is differently construed. It may relate to the closer involvement of primary school governing bodies in the life of the school. However, because governors of primary schools engage in more operational work, it does not necessarily mean that they govern strategically any less effectively. Indeed, the operational work may give them more knowledge and understanding of the institution on which to base strategic decisions and scrutiny. This interpretation is supported by the case study data.

Governing body functioning

Governing bodies of primary and secondary schools broadly function in the same way. This lack of difference between primary and secondary governing body functioning may be because primary and secondary governing bodies generally have similar functions to perform, which is again a finding borne out by the case studies.

Primary school governors find balancing their role as a governor with other responsibilities more challenging than secondary school governors. This finding may be because primary schools have fewer potential governing body members available to them. They may therefore be more likely to draw on potential members who already have a range of other commitments.

In secondary school governing bodies, the clerk is more likely to work in the school in a different capacity. This finding may be explained by secondary schools typically being larger organisations. They may therefore have more 'clerking capacity' available to them within the institution.

Effectiveness and impact

The range of views of primary and secondary school governors of the effectiveness of their governing bodies is similar. Thus, there is no difference between the views of primary governors and secondary governors as to whether their governing body works very effectively. Moreover, their assessments of their effectiveness agreed broadly with Ofsted assessments. The case study research supports this finding. It did not reveal any substantive differences between primary and secondary school governing body processes. However, as we discuss below, the effectiveness of primary school governing bodies strongly links to pupil attainment. The link between secondary school governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment is only very weak. Thus primary school governing body effectiveness relates to pupil attainment in a way that secondary school governing does not.

3.3.2 Governing in high and low attainment schools

Recruitment, induction and training

Schools in low attainment settings are likely to have fewer potential governing body members available to them. There may be a range of explanations for this finding. One possible finding is that low attainment schools are not held in high regard by potential governors. Such schools may be located in settings where schools are not highly valued generally. This assertion could explain both low pupil attainment and the lack of potential governors. The effect of this finding on recruitment is likely to be moderated by other factors. These include the resources that are committed to finding potential governors regardless of the setting, a matter we take up later in the report.

The governing body task

There is no significant difference between the way governors on governing bodies of high attainment schools and those of low attainment schools describe their task. One explanation of this finding is that the task of governing is specified and governors draw on those specifications to describe what they do.

Governing body functioning

Governing bodies of high and low attainment schools broadly function in the same way. This similarity of functioning may be because the governing bodies in both kinds of schools have generally similar functions to perform.

Governors in schools with low attainment find it more challenging balancing their role as a governor with other responsibilities. One interpretation of this finding is that schools with low attainment have fewer potential governing body recruits available to them (see above). They are therefore likely to recruit members who already have a range of other commitments.

Effectiveness and impact

Governors in governing bodies of high attainment schools are more likely to think their governing body works very effectively. This difference may be because governing bodies of high attainment schools overall do have an effect on performance and thus consider themselves to be effective.

The effectiveness of primary school governing bodies has a positive link with pupil attainment but there is no clear link between secondary schools' governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment. This finding is an outcome of the multi-level analysis. That the level of governing body effectiveness only correlates with pupil attainment in primary schools and not in secondary schools is a very important finding. It is consistent with the interpretation that primary school governing is 'closer to the operations' of the school, a finding that was borne out by the case study data.

3.3.3 Governing in high and low SES schools

Recruitment, induction and training

Governing bodies of schools in low SES settings are likely to have fewer potential members. This finding is expected and may be explained in a range of ways.

- Involvement in school governing may not be a priority in those settings.
- The cultural norms in such settings may put off potential governors.
- They may be high mobility settings, which again militates against involvement.

Again, this effect may well be moderated by the recruitment activities that are undertaken to ensure that potential recruits come forward. These recruitment activities are part of the 'agency for governance', an idea we develop later in the report.

Schools with low SES may seek governors to represent the interests of particular community groups. One explanation of this finding is that these schools may serve more varied communities and seek to ensure the involvement of those different stakeholder groups in the governing of the school. That is, there is a difference in the context for governing, which is an idea we develop later in the report.

Mentoring of new governors and their participation in induction is more prevalent in high SES schools. This finding may relate to the eagerness of potential governors to join such governing bodies, a finding that emerged in the analysis of the case study data. This high level of motivation then contributes to new governors' willingness to participate in induction activities.

The governing body task

Governing bodies of schools with high SES are more likely to see the task as:

1. *long- and medium-term planning*
2. *financial management*
3. *representing community and parental interests.*

One interpretation of giving task 1 priority is that high SES schools are less likely to be turbulent and are more secure. These features may enable the governing bodies to focus on longer-term planning. An explanation of the attention given to task 2 is that there is less attention given to pupil attainment matters in such settings. However, there may be other interpretations. The priority given to task 3 may be that a school's relationship with its community stakeholders and parents is more significant in high SES settings. This interpretation again relates to the resources a school has for governing and the way the school interacts with those resources.

Governing body functioning

In the governing bodies of schools with high SES:

- *governors from different stakeholder categories are more likely to work well side-by-side*
- *attendance is more likely to be good*
- *members are more likely to feel able to speak their minds*
- *the clerk is more likely to work in the school in a different capacity.*

These findings point to a general difference in governing body functioning. It may also relate to other differences such as:

- the human resources for governing that are available to schools
- the more diverse nature of governing bodies of low SES schools (see above)
- the pressing tasks that schools in low SES setting may have to deal with.

All these will impact on the way school governance functions. Clerking capacity may be more available from within high SES schools.

Effectiveness and impact

Governors in governing bodies of schools with high SES are more likely to think their governing body works very effectively. This finding may be an accurate assessment but see immediately below.

Governing bodies exert a broadly similar effect on pupil attainment in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings. Again, this finding is the outcome of a multi-level modelling analysis of the data. That SES status does not have an effect on the impact of governing bodies on pupil attainment is an important finding.

4

The analysis of the case study data

4.1

Introduction

The analysis of the qualitative case study data revealed a number of themes which were in five main categories.

1. The context for governing
2. The antecedents for governing
3. The constitution of the governing body
4. The task of the governing body
5. The processes of the governing body

The themes that relate specifically to primary and secondary schools, high and low performing schools, high and low levels of governor performance, and high and low socio-economic status are summarised in this chapter. Before we present the themes, we summarise the research methods to explain what we did. The full details of the research methods, including pen pictures of the schools we studied, are given in Appendix 2.

4.2

The case study research methods

We studied governing in 16 primary schools and 14 secondary schools as individual cases (see Appendix 2 for details). Using the Ofsted database, primary and secondary schools were chosen that were geographically spread and encompassed the variables: high and low governing body effectiveness; high and low school performance; and high and low socio-economic status (SES). In some of these categories, more than one school was studied. In addition, further schools were identified which were 'at the extremes' of the variables that we were interested in – governing quality, school performance and socio-economic context.

In each case, the ChGB, the headteacher and at least one other governor were interviewed and at least one governing body meeting was observed. The interviews explored a range of matters relevant to the nature of the governing of the school. During the meetings, the researcher took field notes. The aspects of governing that

were significant in each particular case were identified. A cross-case analysis was undertaken and emergent themes identified. Full details of the case study methodology are given in Appendix 2.

The outcomes of the cross-case analysis

In this section, we describe the main themes to emerge from the findings under the headings: context; antecedents; task and processes.

4.3.1 Context

The complexity of context

The context for any one school and therefore the context for governing can be particularly complex. For example, there may be competition from local schools, perhaps private schools, as was the case in S6 and S3. Parental choice may mean that the immediate locality is not the pupil's neighbourhood. That may be to the advantage of the school. For example, one school we studied, S5, was more than five times over-subscribed. It may be to the school's disadvantage. For example, P15 was in a very attractive location and was surrounded by large and established area of private housing. However, the school was struggling to recruit pupils. As the headteacher put it: *"If only pupils who lived nearby would come to the school."* Another case study school was in the midst of an extensive area of highly priced housing private housing. The governor we spoke to was clear that parents living in those houses may have the material wealth but they may not have particularly high educational aspirations for their children. There was evidence that the context for governing may be particularly complex in disadvantaged settings.

The dynamic nature of the context

In some of the schools we studied, the context for governing had changed substantially and rapidly in recent times. The school may have faced a crisis of some kind, such as:

- an unsatisfactory outcome of an Ofsted inspection, as in the case of P10, P7 and P5
- a merger, as in the case of P15
- a significant change in school leadership and governing personnel, for example S6 had had three new headteachers in as many years
- an accident or tragedy
- financial difficulties
- a change in the area the school served in terms of ethnic mix, as at P14 and S7

- a decline in pupil numbers, as was the case at S14 and P15. At P9, the community was in some decline, with considerable out-migration, which was affecting pupil numbers.

The factors that influence the dynamics of the context for governing were typically present in combination. Further, some of the schools were in the midst of a rapid state of change which had significant governance implications resulting from these factors. For example, S14, which was in a highly disadvantaged setting, was suffering from falling rolls and was in the process of amalgamating with another school and becoming an academy at the time of the data collection.

The relationship between school governing and context

The relationship between the quality of school governing, socio-economic context, performance or phase did not appear to be direct and causal. Thus, school governing could be of a very high quality in almost any setting. P10, S8, P2, P4 and S7 are good examples. All were in disadvantaged areas but were currently well governed.

- **P10.** In recent times, governing at P10 had run into difficulties but those problems were to do with how governing had been constructed in the past rather than the influence of the context.
- **S8.** At S8 the school performance was relatively poor although it had improved in recent years and was continuing to do so. However, the quality of governance was high.
- **P2.** This primary school was in a disadvantaged inner-city setting but the quality of governing was very impressive.
- **P4.** At P4 the governing body took a strong lead, with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, in challenging key aspects of school practice. These practices, amongst other things, had led to a severe budget crisis, as well as a philosophical debate about supporting children whose first language was not English. The result was a change in school practice.
- **S7.** Key governors on the governing body refused to allow some staff to accept the social context of the school and the pupils' disadvantaged circumstances as an excuse for complacency and low expectations. Their stand led to important changes in teaching practice amongst the senior staff of the school.

The policy context for governing was also affecting the school governing we observed. Some schools, for example S13, were part of joint governing arrangements with another school. However, those arrangements were at an informal stage. There were some joint meetings between the ChGBs of the two federated schools and the ChGBs of each of the schools attended the full governing body meetings of the other school. It was clear that the governing body at S13 was 'working through' the implications of these federation arrangements for the way it operated.

4.3.2 Antecedents

Variation in governing body constitution

The governing bodies varied considerably in the number and types of governors and individual governors varied considerably too. Some full governing body meetings were quite small gatherings, for example P15's. Others were larger such as at S9 and P11. The headteachers of the schools we studied were all members of their governing bodies and made a significant contribution to the collective work of governing.

The numbers of the various categories of governors varied. All had staff members, and members of the school leadership frequently attended as observers. Other member categories were also significant, as we discuss further below.

Students attended the governing body meetings at S5 and S12, which was viewed very positively by those interviewed. The agenda and meeting papers were split so that confidential matters were dealt with separately with the students not present.

The collective nature of school governing

The membership and processes of the governing bodies we studied gave a powerful impression of the collective nature of school governing. Headteachers were members of all the governing bodies. Members of staff, including administrative staff and teaching assistants, were members as staff governors. Other members of staff were often in attendance as additional/associate governors or observers, for example at P10, S3 and P11. At S9, all the school senior management team were present at the meeting. Four members of staff were members of the S1 governing body.

The various members of staff made a substantial contribution to the work of the governing body in a range of ways as we discuss below. Very importantly, they contributed to the notion of school governing as a collective enterprise. In this sense, the governing body was where professional and lay governors worked together to articulate, scrutinise and understand matters to do with the (proper) functioning of the school.

This view of governing as a collective effort was considered to be important by respondents. Headteachers and ChGBs in particular often endeavoured to develop it, as these examples illustrate.

- At S9 the headteacher said with some pride and relief that there were *"no camps or cliques, no sub-pockets"* on the governing body. He clearly felt this helped him in his work as headteacher. These sentiments were echoed by the ChGBs of both S2 and S6.
- The headteacher and the ChGB of P14 were working to improve the capability of the governing body. They emphasised team-building and developing a collegiate approach along with the development of *"a clearer view of what the school needed to improve"* and ensuring that *"the governors were made aware of their role"* (Headteacher).

- At P10, there had been a relatively recent collapse of governance that was being rectified. The ‘interim governors’ had spent a year *“bringing the governing body together”* (Governor) thereby emphasising the collective work of the governing body. In the past, teachers had dominated the governing body and the curriculum committee comprised only teachers with no other governors. One interpretation of those events is that the failure of governance was failure of collective governance.
- At S14, the ChGB felt that the main task of the governing body was *“working as a team”* (his emphasis) *to support the work of the school”*.
- At S7, governors and senior staff met over a weekend to discuss strategy.

Mischievous governors who perhaps have a strong concern about a particular issue or wanted to act in an inappropriate manner could be a problem even in governing bodies that otherwise normally functioned well. Such governors were usually termed *“rogue governors”* by those we spoke to who had experienced the phenomenon. In all the examples we give below, the activities of this kind of governor were usually countered appropriately by the collective ethos of the governing body.

- At S2 – a ‘rogue governor’ was *“got rid of with a sigh of relief”* from the governing body (Headteacher).
- The headteacher of P1 had *“reshaped the GB”* (Field notes) to bring in governors who shared her view of leadership, vision and the development of strategy to enable the school’s performance to improve. A previous chair had thought that vision and strategy were solely the responsibility of the lay governors and that the headteacher should not be involved.
- At S12, a potential governor with a particular agenda tried to mobilise support to get elected by setting up a campaign using Facebook. The campaign *“backfired”* (Field notes) and the individual concerned was not elected.
- The ChGB at P16 felt that a new parent governor was *“not the most discrete person in the playground”* (where parents wait to collect their children after school). He referred explicitly to *“shepherding the potentially troublesome parent away from controversial issues”*, when deciding *“which committee she should go on”* (Field notes).

The public profile of the governing body

In all the cases we studied, the governing body appeared to have a low public profile. We were surprised by the limited amount of information in the public domain on the membership of the governing bodies we studied. Not all schools gave information about school governors and the school governing body on their website. Finding the name of the ChGB was not straightforward.

Arguably, this lack of public presence is surprising given that the governing body is responsible in law for the conduct of the school. There were of course exceptions, for example, P11.

- At P11, the website gave details of who the governors were, what their individual designation was, their particular responsibilities on the governing body and the date when their term of office ended. It also gave very interesting pen portraits – 100 words or so – detailing each governor's expertise, interests in the school, experience as a school governor and other snippets of interesting information.

Staff governors

Teachers and leadership team members who were governors made a mixed contribution to the governing of the schools we studied. However, the contribution was typically beneficial. Even when they attended meetings as observers, members of staff could make a significant contribution. S9, P11 and S7 were examples when this positive influence was very evident. There was also evidence where over-involvement could lead to weak governance, for example in the previous governing body at P10. Respondents on the S7 governing body were clear that staff governors *“provided knowledge and insights that many of the governors lacked”* (Headteacher). A similar view was voiced by the ChGBs and headteachers of S11 and S3.

The status of the staff governor was of interest in relation to membership and activity of teacher unions. The staff governor at S7 was not a union member although she felt that the school had a strong National Union of Teachers (NUT). However, the NUT played no part in selecting her as staff governor. At S12, the staff governor was clear that she was *“representative of the staff and was not the staff representative”*.

Many schools did not need to hold elections for staff governors. Potential staff governors had to be persuaded to take on the responsibility.

- The staff governor of the S14 governing body had held the post for a very long period largely because no other member of staff wanted to take on the responsibility. She was very active in the school, organising a number of formal and informal activities. This staff governor had agreed to join the governing body in the absence of other volunteers.
- At S4 the school did not hold elections for staff governors; appropriate members of staff were asked if they would like to undertake the responsibility.
- At P4 the staff governor was *“appointed in essence by the headteacher”* (Field notes).
- The staff governor at P8 had taken up the responsibility because he *“felt it would help his career progression”* (Field notes).

In one of the meetings we observed, the interactions were unusually antagonistic. In this instance, the staff governors appeared to take up a 'defensive-aggressive' stance in relation to the lay governors especially in the face of particularly challenging questions of which there were a number. There were other instances however where staff governors helped to 'bridge a gap' between the staff and the lay members. This gap was reported by ChGB at P8 as a potential problem. At P9, the headteacher was dynamic, much liked and respected. There was evidence that the teacher on the governing body did not step up to her governing role. She *“was somewhat in awe of the headteacher”* (Field notes), as indeed were the other members of the governing body.

Parent governors

In a number of schools, it was clear that parent governors were important members of the governing body. Although they did not always play a significant role in meetings, their involvement was typically beneficial.

- In one governing body, S5, almost all the members of the full governing body were parents of pupils or their children had attended the school in the past. Our general sense was that this probably contributed more to the governing process than they realised.
- There were issues that related to recruitment and participation as we discuss below, but at P3, which was located in a disadvantaged area, a parent governor who was an experienced foster parent was singled out for particular praise by the ChGB.
- At S9, a parent governor was leading the way in an ad hoc group which had the purpose of improving governor effectiveness.

There were numerous other examples of the considerable and beneficial involvement of parents.

Parental involvement in governing was not without difficulties. Confidentiality could be an issue, for example on staffing matters relating to redundancies and retirements. Generally these issues were managed effectively. The perspective of parent governors could be problematic with some joining the governing body with a narrow interest in their own child's education. As the headteacher at S13 put it: *"One governor can only see his daughter"*. Others may join to find out how the system works, which again can distort their perspective on governing. In the main though, such governors, in the view of the S13 headteacher do *"step up"* to the full governor responsibility. This view was supported by others we interviewed and strongly so by those we interviewed at S5.

However, there was evidence in one school that having a high proportion of parents on the governing body can be problematic. At P8 the clerk to the governing body felt that a *"high proportion of parents"* had in the past hindered the work of the governing body. She considered that the governing body *"was not balanced"*. This issue had been addressed by the new ChGB and the incoming headteacher by the recruitment of members from the school's wider community. There was however a countervailing sense with the governing body at S5. It had a high level of parental presence on the governing body but also considerable professional expertise too.

Local authority representatives

There was evidence that the role of the local authority representative was interpreted in a range of ways and to varying effect.

At P14, a school in a disadvantaged setting, the local authority representative, who was a local authority councillor, was not fully committed to his governing responsibilities.

The local authority representative at P15 was a parent who had been assigned that role but was unsure what its significance was and what his relationship with the local authority was to be. He was a former parent governor and his appointment as local authority governor was *“all rather protracted”*. It had taken several months. He thought that *“maybe the letter (of appointment) got lost”*. When the appointment letter finally arrived, it was brief and as a result *“he was not aware of any additional responsibilities”*. He checked the website but there were *“no terms of reference”* and *“the clerk didn’t have any either”*. He felt that the lack of information was because local authority governors *“tended to be local councillors”* – which he was not. He said: *“I expected a little bit more.”*

Across the dataset, there was a clear sense that the local authority governor held that role in name only. Local authorities did not relate to these governors in any way beyond the initial designation. No particular responsibilities came with the title.

Local councillor involvement

There was evidence that local councillors acting as local authority governors/ members of governing bodies bring both advantages and disadvantages. There was evidence that local councillors in the local authority governor role can bring important expertise and experience and can have a helpful wider policy perspective. Their involvement may not be explicitly ‘political’ (in the party political sense). For example, the headteacher of P10 was clear that their involvement was *“not political”*. When they participated at governing body meetings, they did not seek to bring party politics into the debate. At S13, the ChGB was a local councillor who saw the responsibility as an important aspect of his work as a councillor.

In other examples, there were problems, typically about conflict over roles.

- At P4, tensions existed over a local authority decision to exercise claw-back from the school budget. The local councillor chose not to attend when the issue was being discussed at a meeting of the governing body.
- At S7, where again there were significant budgetary matters, including a claw-back of the school’s budget, the local authority governor attended the relevant meeting. At the meeting, he defended the local authority decision, which was to the school’s disadvantage. His line *“irritated the other governors”* (Field notes) who argued that he should resolve this conflict of interest.

The involvement of local councillors can bring complications.

- The local councillor who was the local authority governor at P8 had resigned from the governing body because he was in conflict over a grant to a charity in which he and another governor were involved. The ChGB was holding open a community governor vacancy place on the governing body in the hope the councillor would return when the conflict had been resolved.
- The ChGB of the P14 governing body felt that the local authority councillor, who was also the local authority representative on the governing body, was not as committed to his responsibilities as he might have been because of other duties.

- The headteacher at P13 was very direct: *“local authority governors let us down”*. She added: the councillors are

“in it for political reasons – their party, they want to be part of a successful school in the area but they don’t attend, don’t know much about the school, and they’re not committed.”

- At S5, the continual non-attendance of a local councillor at governing body meetings was a source of considerable tension. Over a number of years, the governor concerned had attended only two of the meetings previous to the one observed where he was again absent. His apologies were once more not accepted by the meeting.

Recruitment

Recruitment is an ever-present issue

The recruitment of governors was very likely to be a continual concern for all governing bodies. The continual nature of the concern was due to the limited tenure of governors and the changing commitment to the school, for example with parent governors when their children leave. The headteacher at P1 referred to this turnover as *“churn”*, as a result of which the governing body is *“always a moving constituency”*. Recruitment and succession planning were therefore considered to be important and were made a priority.

At one school, P6, a parent governor accepted that her governing body was *“not good at succession planning for governors”*, an impression we gained of many of the governing bodies we studied. Despite the general view that the turnover of parent governors was an issue, at S4, *“the parent turnover rate was not high, e.g., recent leavers had been governors for eight years”* (Field notes). Sometimes, because of unexpected resignations or the coincident ending of the term of office of a number of governors, turnover of governing body membership can be substantial. This high level of churn can have implications for the collective capability of the governing body. As one very experienced governor observed, the new members were *“well motivated but inexperienced”*. Moreover, referring to the development of governing expertise, she was clear: *“it takes time”*.

The time and effort expended by headteachers, ChGBs and members of the governing body on recruitment was considerable. Examples of proactive strategies, which included targeting likely candidates and advertising for governors were reported at P7, S3 and S6, amongst others. We discuss this proactive recruitment further below.

The difficulty of recruiting can vary and does not follow a fixed pattern. The S11 headteacher felt that recruitment *“changes from year to year”* and the difficulty of recruiting is exacerbated by the number of vacancies.

Recruitment strategies

Schools use a range of strategies to recruit, especially in disadvantaged areas.

- At S6, where they were experiencing current difficulties in recruiting governors, they used contacts, direct approaches, advertisements, and they actively sought out and targeted potential governors.
- At P15, a voluntary aided school in a disadvantaged setting, the wife of the ChGB was a member of the governing council of the church. She announced when governors were needed at meetings of the council. The last time she made such an announcement, *“we had a new recruit straight away”* (ChGB). At this school, recruitment generally was not a particular problem with parents putting themselves forward for recruitment and several teachers offering to join the governing body.
- At P1, the headteacher gave positive messages to parents about becoming a governor when children joined the school at the reception stage in an attempt to enhance recruitment.

All the governors of P9 school lived locally in an area which could be described as ‘white working class’ with a high level of socio-economic disadvantage. The members of the governing body were deeply committed to the school and *“the school was well-liked”* (Field notes). However, the headteacher had *“given up on”* recruiting governors with professional occupations to the governing body because *“none live locally”* (Field notes). He was now attempting to develop the capability of the governing body to improve and secure the governance of the school.

At S1, a high performing grammar school, there was a waiting list of people who want to be governors. Recruiting new governors was therefore relatively straightforward. The ChGB stated: *“We’re over-subscribed because people want to be associated with a successful school.”*

Recruiting parent governors

Finding parent governors can be difficult especially in areas of disadvantage, for example, S6. Schools in such circumstances may well not hold elections for parent governors.

- The headteacher of S8, a secondary school in a disadvantaged setting, said: *“We invite nominations but no-one comes forward”*. A similar picture was painted by the headteacher and ChGB of S3.
- The headteacher of S9, a secondary school, felt that *“recruiting parent governors can be difficult.”*
- At P4, the headteacher was clear: *“We can’t get parent governors.”*
- At P2, the difficulty of recruiting of parents was further complicated by the ethnic diversity of the school’s catchment area. *“Members of minority ethnic communities were unsure of the governor role or unwilling to assert themselves in governing settings”* (Field notes) (see below).

- The headteacher of P14 reported that *“parents are the main recruitment difficulty”*. He felt the recruitment problem was directly related to the setting of the school, which was very disadvantaged.
- At S14, the headteacher said that *“good parent governors are hard to find”*.
- At the P16 governing body meeting, there was a lengthy discussion about parents’ understanding of the work of the governing body. Suggestions to raise the profile included:

“A Governor Corner in the news-sheet to parents, a specific mention of the work of the GB in the school newspaper, the chair’s presentation at the new parents’ evening, re-vamping the governor notice board and a parent email link to the GB on the website” (Field notes).

However, at S10 a *“well regarded”* (ChGB) school in a disadvantaged area, the ChGB said that for parent governors *“we hold elections every time”*. Thus, the idea that recruiting parent governors in disadvantaged areas is always difficult is not the case. For example, at P9, where there was a very experienced and dynamic headteacher who was a *“strong local character”* (Field notes), according to the ChGB, recruiting parent governors was not a problem.

At P6, which was a high-performing school in an advantaged setting, parent governor elections had had to be held recently as there were more nominations than places. Interestingly, at that election the ChGB felt there had been a relatively high turnout with over a third of the parents voting. However, those interviewed at P6 agreed that recruiting governors was getting harder.

There were issues relating to recruiting parent governors in disadvantaged areas. At both P4 and S7 for example the ChGBs argued that securing parents from the predominantly ethnic community was problematic. Cultural traditions frequently meant that parents contributed little in formal meetings: *“They don’t speak”* (Headteacher of P4). They were frequently put off by the formal and specialised education language.

At P8 the current and previous ChGBs were parents. They both came from military backgrounds and brought excellent organisational and analytical skills.

At S12, which was a high school with pupils from Year 9 to Year 13, recruiting parent governors was a particular problem. The children of potential parent governors were older; those we spoke to thought that:

- this changed parents’ motivation to become involved in governing
- many potential governors had already been governors previously when their children were younger
- by the time potential governors could be engaged, their children may be considering leaving the school or only had a few more years at the school.

The idea of parents gradually engaging with the school through parent groups of a range of kinds and then becoming involved in governing was a familiar theme. At P9, the ChGB had been a former chair of the parent-teacher association. This gradual engagement was used at S12 explicitly as a way of engaging potential parent governors.

Proactive recruitment

There was evidence of headteachers, ChGBs and other governors of effective governing bodies actively seeking out and engaging potential governors.

- The S2 headteacher had been in post for four years during which time the reputation of the school had been re-established following a period of decline. The headteacher was clear that he *“did not want passengers on the governing body”*. He wanted good governors and actively sought them out.
- The headteacher of S12 joined the school when it was in special measures. She had *“inherited a core of elderly governors who had a great deal to say – most reflecting on the past”*. The headteacher actively recruited professional parent governors because *“things needed to get better fast”*.
- Some schools such as P2 and S13 had successfully used the School Governors One-Stop Shop to recruit governors.
- Other headteachers and ChGBs had approached local businesses or large employing organisations with local branches for potential recruits.
- At one school where the governing body was not particularly strong, the headteacher listed a number of recruitment methods. However, so concerned was she with managing a school in somewhat challenging circumstances, she seemed to lack the motivation to actively seek out good governors.

Recruitment from members of the local community

Good governors may not be part of the local community, that is, they may not live in the school's immediate neighbourhood. However, there were examples where governors have strong connections with the community but may no longer live there.

- At S8, which was in a very disadvantaged area, some governors knew of and/or had lived near the school and currently lived some way away. One of the governors lived a considerable distance away.
- One very active member of the governing body at P15, a Voluntary Aided school, lived 12 miles from the school. He said he *“sang in the choir of the school's church”*. He had volunteered when someone *“gave a request speech”* (to be a school governor) at the choir rehearsal, although he had *“never really had much to do with schools”*.

'Community' in the sense of 'community governor' needs to be characterised in a sophisticated way; it is not simply a question of living locally.

Frequently, members of professions who lived locally had been attracted to governing and many were viewed as having the required skills.

- The governing body at S1, a selective school in an advantaged area, had a high level of professional representation – engineers, dentists and solicitors. Because of the way the school was viewed in the local community, it tended to *“attract governors who are known in the community, who have prestige”* (Headteacher). Such governors are *“well connected”* (ChGB).
- The governing body at S8, which was in a disadvantaged area, attracted governors from the professions, largely due to the way it had been established as a ‘Fresh start school’ with a partnership between the local authority, the local university and the local church.
- In contrast, at P9, as we have described, the headteacher had ceased to attempt to recruit local members of professions because very few lived locally.

Recruitment from minority ethnic groups

Recruiting governors from minority ethnic groups, especially women, can be difficult as we heard on a number of occasions (for example at P4 and S7 – see above). When they do join the governing body, they may not participate fully.

- A Somali parent had recently been recruited to the P2 governing body. She *“sat with the other women parent governors and didn’t speak unless specifically asked for her thoughts”* (Field notes).
- At S13, the staff governor reported that there were *“no Muslims”* on the governing body which *“doesn’t reflect the ethnic mix”* of the pupils. It has to be said, however, there were two black Africans, one Asian and one Afro-Caribbean governor on the governing body.
- The headteacher of S4 felt strongly that there was a need to ensure that the ethnic make-up of the governing body reflected that of the school. He felt that recruiting governors to achieve this end would perhaps require *“almost positive discrimination”*.

Recruitment in high pupil mobility settings

There was evidence that recruitment, of parents in particular, can be difficult in high mobility settings, such as P14. ‘High mobility parents’ in such settings may:

- be unfamiliar with school governing and may not understand it
- be over-stayers and may not want to engage with ‘the authorities’
- find the work of school governing – challenge and scrutiny – to be at odds with their cultural norms and values.

At one school, the high level of mobility, which impacted on governing, appeared to be the result of the local authority moving families (and pupils) around the borough in different temporary accommodation locations. These changes in accommodation

resulted in pupils moving school. There was a countervailing view expressed by one governor on this school's governing body. She felt that the movement of pupils had been in part to do with the quality of the education provision. As she put it:

"In a high quality school, pupils don't move. Parents – whoever they are – want to keep their children in the school."

Ensuring and developing the collective work of the governing body through recruitment

It was clear that respondents felt that the collective work of the governing body was important and that it was underpinned by a commitment to governing. Some governing bodies (more specifically the ChGB and/or the headteacher) were active in ensuring that the members of the governing body maintained their commitment to governing. They were clear that school governing was not to be thought of as easy or something that could be undertaken half-heartedly.

There were examples of ChGBs actively ensuring the commitment and quality of governors by continually 'weeding out' those who lack the commitment required.

At P1, where there were co-chairs, one of the chairs said:

"I always emphasise the graft necessary and the commitment to participate in the life of the school and to attend meetings of committees and the full governing body."

She had in the past approached governors who were not playing their full part and suggested that *"maybe their job didn't give them enough time and that it might be better for them to leave."*

Maintaining the culture of the governing body was considered to be important. For example, the ChGB at S9 was clear that the collective sense of governing was significant and the shared sense of values was important. As he put it, as if expressing a 'rule': *"Don't let the culture shift."* When recruiting new governors, a key concern for him was: *"Do the governors fit?"* He was clear: *"We put lot of thought into it."*

At P8, the headteacher and the ChGB had been eager to re-balance the governing body membership. They had been keen to have a strong set of parent governors who were concerned about the success of the whole school. This increased parent representation had been achieved with parent governors often coming via the parent and teacher association / friends of the school route (see 'Recruiting parent governors' above).

At S5, the governing body was taking a very hard line with the non-attendance of a local councillor, which they interpreted as a lack of commitment to the school and the work of governing.

Barriers to recruitment

The challenges of recruiting governors can be viewed from two standpoints:

1. Those who may join – governors
2. Those who are undertaking the recruiting – governing bodies.

For governors. A number of factors may prevent potential governors actually taking up the role as follows.

- **The commitment.** The P10 ChGB felt that *“parents get scared off”* and that he *“tries to shield them”* (from the full impact of the complexity and responsibility of school governing). He was clear: *“we must make it (school governing) simpler for people”*. At another school, the ChGB reported the shock that some new governors felt after the induction. It was at that point that it became clear to them exactly what the scale and scope of the responsibility of being a school governor was.
- **The phase of the school.** A governor at S11, who had been a governor in a primary school before joining the S11 governing body, felt that the responsibilities of secondary school governors were greater than those of a governor in a primary school. He felt: *“There is more to do in a secondary school. Everything is on a bigger scale”*. The ChGB at S14 felt that the whether a school was a primary or a secondary could act as a deterrent to potential governors:

“Secondaries are bigger, more complicated, full of unruly boys and girls in the minds of many. This puts people off”.

- **Confidence in their capability.** Potential governors' own confidence in their capabilities to be a governor was also an issue. The headteacher at P14 felt that *“getting parents to believe that they have something to give”* was a challenge. Overcoming the feeling that governing was something that others could do better was also difficult.
- **The meetings times and duration.** The times when meetings are held may prevent the involvement of some potential members of the governing body. Meetings are often in the early evening, which then has implications for managing child care. For example, the staff governor at S13 found being a governor *“interesting but the meetings are long.”* She was definite: *“It would be better if meetings were more family friendly. I couldn't do it if I had primary-aged children.”*

For governing bodies. A number of aspects of recruiting governors were problematic for the governing bodies, as follows.

- **Ensuring potential recruits have an understanding of and commitment to the role.** There were examples of ChGBs ensuring that recruits and potential recruits understood the role and the responsibilities they were taking on. The ChGB at P13 said that he *“sits down with every new member of the governing body and makes it clear to them what the commitment is”*. Other successful examples came from S2 and S6.

- **The status and standing of the school.** Schools with high levels of pupil attainment may have a waiting list, for example S1. At S6, the ChGB felt this preference for being a governor of such schools reduced the availability of potential governors in less attractive schools: *“We lose out to this kind of competition”*. At S14, a National Challenge school in a very disadvantaged setting, the headteacher was clear:

“Schools with NC reputation don’t find it easy to recruit, unlike those that are better off schools in the local authority.”

- **Recruiting from the business community.** There was evidence that recruiting governors from the business community could be difficult. S7, a school in an ethnically diverse setting with an above average number of pupils eligible for free school meals, was a good example. Schools like P7 benefited greatly from the active and generous support of a well-known engine manufacturer. This employer both encouraged its employees to become governors and agreed to release them for a certain amount of time in the working day to attend meetings of the governing body.

Governing capability

Governor motivation

The locus of interest in governing and therefore the motivation of governors was a significant theme. There appear to be three main sub-themes in the motivation of governors for their participation in governing, as follows.

1. **Self-interest.** Here the motivation is underpinned by the individual’s own advancement/agenda/issues. There is thus a primacy of individual self-interest, and commitment to governing may be short term, as these examples illustrate.
 - The local authority governors at P7 were thought to be working to their *“own agenda”* (ChGB) although this was deemed to be *“nothing serious”*.
 - ‘Rogue governors’ may also have similar preoccupying interests and agendas (see above) as was the case at S2.
 - At S6, the ChGB felt that *“some governors have selfish reasons”* and are on the governing body *“for the CV”* or *“to be able to say they are contributing to community renewal”*.
 - One governor at P8 started as a parent governor during the 1980s *“in the Thatcher era”* (ChGB) to find out where all the money she said she was giving to schools in taxes was actually being spent.
 - At P13, the ChGB referred to one particular governor as *“self-serving”*. When that motivation had been satisfied his consistent non-attendance at meetings meant that he *“sacked himself”*. At the same school, the headteacher was clear that people – local councillors in this case – *“want to be part of a successful school”* but that they sometimes did not make a significant contribution.

2. **Interests of other(s).** With this group, the motivation is concerned with the advancement of the school, the school's pupils and possibly the advancement of all schools and all pupils. There is thus a primacy of plural, collective, and 'other' interest. Those in this group may have a broad/multiple set of interests in governing work and their commitment to governing may be long term, as these examples illustrate.

- They may want to *"put something back into the community"* as the headteacher at S1 put it.
- The ChGB at S7 had been connected with the school for over 20 years.
- At P3, a governor when asked what underpinned the governing body's central interest was clear: *"We all just love the school"*, indicating a particular quality of motivation. Some respondents identified higher-level motives including to help *"create a better school, to improve life chances (of pupils)"*.
- At S10, the ChGB felt that all the governors were *"enthusiastic about the school"*.
- The ChGB at S12 had a *"passion for education"* and felt very strongly that *"every child deserves the opportunity"* to benefit from a high quality education.

3. **External motivation.** In this instance, the motivation to participate is because being a governor may be part of another role, such as being a local councillor or the local vicar.

There is interplay between the different forms of motivation and some governors may have mixed motives. Motivation to participate may shift over time, especially moving from self-interest to a concern for the interests of others. Moreover, the motivation of governors may not be apparent. In the words of the S11 ChGB, the main motivation is:

"Difficult to fathom in the case of a few but most of us want to put something back into the community."

A member of the P8 governing body felt that many parent governors have a *"concern for their own children's education"* but that this main interest did not necessarily lead to them having a narrow view of school governing. The staff governor at S13 felt that a motivation for some members of the governing body was *"the political side of it"*. At P2, the ChGB clearly saw his role as part of a lifelong dedication to promoting social equality.

Motivation to undertake particular governing tasks can be low in particular instances. For example, at P15 the headteacher had asked the governing body for volunteers to revise the complaints policy but none had done so. The ChGB however felt that in this instance the members of the governing body were doing all they could as governors.

The importance of the core group

There was evidence that an authoritative, experienced, long-standing and hard-working core group of governors in the governing body can be very helpful. It was a feature of many of the effective governing bodies – for example at S2, P1 and S13. At S9, the core group was very effective at scrutiny: *“they will turn over the stones”*, as the ChGB put it.

In addition to the core group, the group deemed by many respondents to be crucial to governing body functioning were the headteacher, the ChGB and the clerk. Successful examples of these close working relationships were seen in S2, S3, P7 and S6.

Some members of the core/experienced group may have held very senior positions previously in their working career, or may have had considerable experience of previous governing roles.

1. The Chair of the Premises Committee at P8 had previously been the ChGB at another school. He was very comfortable with this role. He believed that the ChGB of a primary school needed to be a parent, which he was not.
2. The clerk to the governing body at S7 had previously been a deputy headteacher in a nearby school.
3. The clerk at S10 was also the school business manager and was highly energetic and proactive as the clerk in organising governing matters.

Even if there is no core group of experienced and capable governors, having some ‘heavyweight’ educational expertise on the governing body can be useful.

- At S8, the ChGB was highly experienced in education and currently worked in education as a consultant. There were senior members of the local university, and experienced professionals some of whom worked in education, on the governing body.
- A particular governor at P14 was deemed to be very useful. There the ChGB was clear: *“We were very fortunate to secure the services of a former LA adviser and Ofsted inspector who contributes hugely.”* This governor was very generous with his time and expertise. All those interviewed at P14 felt that he, along with the headteacher and the ChGB, were the key people who influenced how the governing body worked.
- The ChGB at S13 felt that a particular strength of the governing body was a group of *“experienced governors”* who were *“knowledgeable in their insight”* and who were *“not afraid to raise issues and to challenge”*.
- At S4, there was a very conspicuous core group of experienced and long-standing governors.

The level of capability

There was considerable evidence of a great deal of expertise and capability in the school governing system, such as the ChGBs at P3, P10 and P2 amongst many others. The very high level of commitment and motivation – passion almost – amongst many of the ChGBs was particularly striking in many instances.

There were, of course, examples where the level of capability was relatively low. Those describing the lack of capability – typically the headteachers – would be positive about the governors as people but they wanted more questioning from them at all/any level, not just acceptance. Further, in those instances, the members of the governing body may be very helpful in particular aspects of governing, for example at P9 and P5, and in the detailed scrutiny of the finances and premises management at P15. There was evidence that headteachers wanted validation of the immediate and long-term functioning of all aspects of the school through wise and thoughtful checking by the governing body.

Importantly, there was evidence that weak lay members of the governing body do not have a neutral effect. They are actually a drain on the leadership of the school and have a negative effect. For example at one school, the lack of capability on the governing body added to the headteacher's difficulties in improving the school's performance. A similar frustration was experienced by the headteacher of another school. He was very positive about the governors' qualities as well-meaning members of the community. However, he wanted more from them in terms of the governance of the school.

The importance of skills/capability balance

A sense of balance in the governing body in relation to the skills and capabilities was deemed to be important in many cases. For example at S6, the range of dimensions including skills and areas of interest was highly valued: *"Some attended to the curriculum and financial viability; some took a community perspective, some a standards and targets perspective"* (Field notes).

There were examples where individual governors specialised in particular aspects of governing responsibilities:

- finance on P15's governing body
- governor effectiveness at S9
- data on the governing bodies of P11 and P3
- premises at P15.

At a meeting of the S5 full governing body, one governor was an accountant with a major accountancy firm. She led the way with some in-depth scrutiny of the budget that was presented to the meeting. She was also attempting to work closely with the financial administrator in the school. With such specific interests there was the

attendant risk that the specialisation could become too interesting, which could skew the work of the governing body. The ChGB appeared to have a role in ensuring that this distortion did not happen.

Data scrutinising capability

Expertise and interest in pupil performance data somewhere in the governing body can be very helpful. For example, the governor at P3, who was a former secondary school mathematics teacher, had this role. At P4, the local authority governor took up this role. There were examples, such as at P13 and P14, of members of governing bodies undertaking training to work with RAISEonline so they would collectively have expertise in the school's performance data. The headteacher was confident that the members of the governing body would have a detailed understanding of data – and its meaning – *“they would understand what a shift of three points in the Yps score meant”*. In many of the governing bodies, for example S9 and P3, a governing body committee had a specific responsibility to scrutinise performance data. Some of the governing bodies gained significant benefit from individual governors who had a fascination with data, as was the case at P11. The account that follows is the researcher's field notes.

- One member of the governing body of P11 had a particular interest in pupil performance data. Before the meeting was scheduled to start, he was busy leafing through a document which clearly contained tables of figures and various data graphs. He energetically flicked back and forth through the pages. He had his head down going through the document while other members of the governing body laughed and joked. There was a very relaxed and good-humoured atmosphere. The meeting began and progressed according to the agenda. The meeting included an excellent session led by a teacher on internet security/child protection at the school. At one point on the agenda, pupil performance was discussed. The discussion centred on the School Improvement Partner's Report, which it turned out this particular governor had been reading. He asked a number of questions including one or two which could be described as detailed and obscure. Very importantly, the headteacher was able to explain the points being made and to answer the queries. She did so in a very assured, expert and professional way. It appeared that the detailed scrutiny of the data by the governor had brought out the very best in the headteacher.

Often a change in the governing body, typically a new headteacher as in the case of S9 and P14, can bring about a change in the data reporting procedures. At the S9 governing body meeting, there was a preliminary review of the school's performance data. The data was to be scrutinised by a committee which would then report back at the next full governing body meeting, which was a new procedure.

The scrutiny of financial data was also important and there was evidence of governors being unwilling to sign off a budget because the way in which the figures were presented was unclear.

There was a specific example, S14, where the governing body had in the past held

the view that managing pupil performance was the headteacher's responsibility. It was deemed too complex and too difficult for the governing body to engage with. So, for example, in the past the school staff and the governing body had not addressed the issue of in-school variance. This variation is the difference in test/examination results between different departments/teachers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the governing body had been taken aback when the school was named as a National Challenge school. The situation had changed in the governing body now, however, although scrutinising capability was developing only slowly. In many governing bodies we observed, example at P16, the Self-evaluation Form and the School Improvement Plan were central in much of the discussion for many agenda items.

The development of capability

There was widespread participation in training and development of a range of different kinds. However, the problem of not every governor participating was widespread. For example, for both induction and other training some participated willingly, others less so. In the words of one headteacher, *"some feel they don't need it"*. As the ChGB at S14 said: *"There is a mixed take-up (of training). We can't make them go but there is strong encouragement."*

The uptake of training was very low in some cases. For example, at P9, the field notes on training and development reported:

"Explicitly stated by headteacher: 'None of the members of the FGB had done much training. The Chair had done none and perhaps one member of the FGB had done any at all'."

For some governors, induction can be a particularly important moment. There was evidence from schools such as P7 that some governors only fully understood the significance of their responsibilities following their induction. A governor at P13 felt that the 'induction moment' had been particularly important.

There was widespread evidence of headteachers who are also governors initiating the development of school governing capability. Headteachers often undertook this responsibility. They did so when governing was weak and/or there was a lack of capability or willingness to develop capability in the governing body itself, for example, at P5 and S12. Arguably, in the long term, headteachers should not be solely responsible for ensuring governing body capability. The governing body collectively should take on this responsibility for itself. If the development of governing body capability does become solely the headteacher's responsibility it can be a drain on the headteacher's resources, as was the case at P5. It can also result in weak governance, as had occurred in the past at P10.

The process of developing governing body capability can be slow, as a governor at P10 put it: *"It takes time to change a governing body"*. That sentiment was echoed by the headteacher and the ChGB at P14. In the past, the P14 governing body had not taken up a scrutiny role but the new headteacher was *"keen for the governing body to question"*.

Some governing bodies, such as P14 and S2, have a formal reporting back to the governing body of any training sessions undertaken by governors.

A number of the governing bodies we studied used full governing body and committee meetings for training, for example P7. In those cases we observed, the purpose of the training was to enable the governors to link performance and practice matters with policy scrutiny and development. Active engagement at these meetings enhanced the collective nature of the governing process. For example, the music co-ordinator at P13 gave an excellent presentation of pupil performance in music, the policy underpinnings, and the action plan for improvement. The members of the committee (six lay members and two members of staff and two teacher observers) all played on a range of musical instruments – with much laughter, enjoyment and understanding gained.

Members of governing bodies we spoke to generally had very clear views about training and its focus and the need for it to be relevant. For example, at S14, the training undertaken by the governing body focused on *“raising attainment, monitoring data and some on academies”* which exactly matched the school’s strategic needs. Often training, strategic visioning or review was shared with other governing bodies. There was evidence that meeting other governors at joint training events and sharing experiences, ways of working and ideas can be very beneficial.

The ‘Blue Skies’ event held by the P1 governing body was a particularly creative example of how strategic visioning can be undertaken. It involved staff, governors and some parents and pupils. The whole event was orchestrated by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher who dressed up as members of the air crew of a passenger plane! Similar creative development activities, for example at P13 and P11 added considerably to the development work. At S12, two Year 13 students were invited to give a presentation on the school council to the full governing body. A governor asked how the governing body could help the work of the council. The students responded by inviting a member of the governing body to attend a meeting, talk about the work of the governing body and meet the council.

The role of additional governors in enhancing governing body capability

Additional governors were useful in a range of ways, and in particular in adding valuable expertise, for example at S5. There was evidence that governors from other governing bodies can be particularly useful in strengthening a governing body and in ‘turning a school round’. For example, at P10, four or five interim governors were ‘appointed’ by the local authority. Some of the interim governors were ChGBs elsewhere. In the words of the new ChGB, this group *“was a team around which I could build”*. The headteacher at P10 felt that the governing body was *“re-emerging as a team”* and that vacancies were gradually being filled. Both the headteacher and the ChGB felt that the process may well be slow. However, the additional governors were *“there for the long haul”* in the words of the headteacher.

The issue of capability for governing

The level and kind of expertise required for governing emerged as an issue. The matters of interest related to understanding the work of schools generally and the governors' own school in particular, and the demanding nature of governing.

Understanding the jargon can be difficult even for very capable and experienced governors. Nonetheless, the governor from the P10, who was also a governor at a nearby school, was clear: *"Governing bodies should understand education"* and that governors *"need to experience the school directly"*. She further eloquently argued that:

"To govern, it's important that the governors know or they don't know what to look at. Scrutiny yes, but you have to go in and experience it; they need to visit the school."

She clearly felt that governors need to have first-hand experience of the school in operation. This particular governor raised the question of whether school governing was becoming beyond the scope of a voluntary responsibility, such was the commitment she felt it required. She said it was *"difficult to do the job"* (that is to be a governor) *when you're not involved in it day to day* and that *"too much is expected of governing bodies"*. A long-standing and very experienced governor at S5 was also clear:

"whatever your day job, being a governor takes time. Whatever your day job, governing is a different thing. It's just not like anything else."

The usefulness of specific skills

Specific expertise may be more useful in primary schools where that expertise is not available through the administrative/management staff of the school. For example, at P1, governors were directly involved with contracts, health and safety and premises. Indeed one governor was a contracts lawyer and specifically took on that legal work for the school. At P4, the school's finances were closely overseen by a (community) governor as was the case at P15 and S5. This involvement was seen as very useful by some of the headteachers. Indeed the headteacher at P8 viewed part of the governing task, at least, in this way. Governors were overseeing the building of the new toilets at the school when we visited.

Assessment of the skills in the governing body

There was evidence that skills audits by the governing bodies can be useful in developing their overall capability. S2, S6, S3 and P8 used such audits to help achieve a balance of skills in their governing bodies. The new ChGB at P8 had carried out a skills audit and had identified gaps.

In primary schools, there was evidence of a desire to seek out particular skills and/or potential contributions. The headteacher at P1 stated that she specifically looked for skills where she was not strong. For her this was in the areas of health and safety, finance and project management.

Financial skills were often particularly welcomed by primary school governing bodies. For example at P15, the headteacher and the ChGB had participated in a two and a half day course on school financial management. They had also recruited an accountant to the governing body who had become the Chair of the Finance Committee. At this school, skills in premises management had been particularly welcome. Equally, at P4 a governor provided a great deal of financial and statistical analysis expertise.

Attendance

Persistent non-attendance was an issue in some governing bodies. For example at S13, the staff governor said of her fellow governors, *“Some rarely show up for meetings”*. In some governing bodies, for example S5, non-attendance by councillors and others with heavy commitments such as the vicar at P15, could result in their infrequent or late attendance. There was evidence that persistent non-attendance was a way in which governors messaged their lack of commitment and prioritisation of governing work. This non-attendance was generally ‘managed’ and typically non-attenders left the governing body.

4.3.3 The task

Defining the task of governing

The task tended to be captured in a range of ways by respondents:

- *“supporting and encouraging the school and its leadership;*
- *accountability*
- *providing challenge*
- *scrutiny*
- *asking questions*
- *strategising*
- *providing checks and balances*
- *acting as a critical friend*
- *providing strategic direction and leadership*
- *establishing direction and ethos*
- *developing policies*
- *fulfilling statutory obligations.”*

The S8 headteacher was clear that the governing body saw its task being *“very supportive of the whole school and not afraid to challenge”* and brought *“a very high level of scrutiny”*.

Where governing was weak there was a lack of scrutiny. *“Not enough questioning – there’s not enough questioning of what I say/do”* as the P5 headteacher firmly put it. At P2, the ChGB felt that the ‘critical friend’ phrase captured the task which he felt was: *“to push the staff to do that little bit more and to support them”*. Respondents

did not describe the task specifically in relation to the performance of the school. In all their descriptions of the task, reference to performance was omitted although it was there implicitly for many.

At P9, the members of the governing body appeared to feel that their main task was to “help” and to be “an extra pair of hands” (Field notes). Similarly, a governor at P15 was praised by another member of the governing body for his practical contribution to the school: “He’s been excellent at doing odd jobs around the place; we’d have been really stuck without him” (Chair of the Premises Committee). It was not clear whether this work was considered to be a governor responsibility or work that was undertaken by someone who was a governor.

According to the field notes taken at P12:

“Both the HT and the ChGB saw it (governing) as being about the ‘critical friend’ (as they called it) but it was clear that the emphasis was on the ‘friend’ – the head was explicit in the argument that ‘friend’ was a necessary precursor to ‘critical’. The ‘monitoring’ aspect as it was styled wasn’t comfortable for the head and she seemed to express a clear preference for ‘support’ – in contrast to the chair. At the same time it was highlighted that they’d got a strong working relationship” (Field notes).

Interestingly, the ChGB at this school, P12, was very clear during interview: “Whenever the head wants support, she gets it.”

The idea that the governing body supports the school is complex. At S9, the ChGB was definite: “We support the head even if he is wrong.” This interpretation of the task bore some similarity to the way the task was conceptualised at P6 by a parent governor: “To make sure the headteacher is able to do his job.”

The notion of challenge is similarly complex. At S7, key members of the core group had challenged the views of senior staff over the role and ambitions of the school. At P4, again the core group, with the headteacher (and the deputy headteacher), had challenged school practice.

In schools with a high level of performance, the task tended to be viewed relatively straightforwardly. Thus the ChGB at S1, a grammar school, felt that the task for the governing body was “straightforward because the school is well run and is very successful”. However, he was also certain: “At the same time it (the task of governing) can be challenging because of the high expectations from parents.”

The task of governing may appear to be more substantial in secondary schools, if only because they are larger. This may give the impression that, in the words of the ChGB of S4, secondary governing requires “a more business-oriented structure” and “more division of labour” on the governing body.

A governor at P8 had been a governor before at his children’s primary school, where he had become ChGB. In his words he “retired from governing” when his children moved to secondary school. He did not want to be a governor in a secondary school.

He had rejoined P8's governing body as they needed to strengthen their financial and business management skills and governing capabilities. He did not want to be a governor of a secondary school because he felt:

"In primary schools you are so much closer to the school and the children, it's hands on and direct. Governing a secondary school is so much more like running a business."

The strategic-operational divide was well understood by respondents, as the following examples show.

- At S9, the ChGB was very firm: *"We (the governing body) will not interfere with the day-to-day operation of the school"*. However, the same ChGB in asserting that the governing body has *"always been important"*, felt that the governing body *"had kept the school going when the previous head was ill"*.
- From interviews with lay members at S6, they were definite that the headteacher was responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, organisation and administration.
- At S4, the headteacher had a good relationship with the governing body. He felt they offered good challenge without being overbearing. They understood their *"overarching role, for example, the line between managerial and strategic"*. He considered that it is *"not for the GB to change what the headteacher wants but they have the right to ask questions"* (Field notes).
- Importantly, there was evidence from observations, for example at P13, and interviews, for example the ChGB at P3, that strategic decision-making and scrutiny were enhanced by a detailed understanding of in-school processes and practices.

Changes in the task

There was evidence that the main task of the governing body can change over time.

- At S9, the governing body was very concerned with managing the acquisition of trust status. It was a 'new task' and a major agenda item in the meeting we observed.
- Substantial building projects, for example at P10 where new premises were built as part of the Private Finance Initiative, can be a major preoccupation. This focus may result in less attention being paid to school performance. The current headteacher at P10 felt that this fixation and lack of attention to performance had been an issue in the past and had resulted in a decline in pupil performance. At S4, overseeing the management of the construction of a new building at a cost of £13m was a significant responsibility for the governing body.
- At P6, a long-standing need to find a location for a new school building preoccupied the governing body. It was a complex, strategic planning task with significant political dimensions.

A sophisticated view of the task

A 'sense of ownership/stewardship/protection' of the school emerged as important. There was considerable evidence that governors felt that they collectively 'owned', and held the responsibility for the school's conduct and success. Further, they were custodians, supervisors and guardians of the school. Moreover, it was their responsibility to safeguard and defend the school.

In 'disadvantaged areas', governing bodies may develop a sense that they are 'comrades in adversity' in this role and in engaging with this task. For example, at P11, the discussion of the provision of new buildings was characterised as 'Other schools are getting these new resources, why aren't we?' It has to be said, however, that the ChGB did not allow this line of discussion to get out of hand.

In some governing bodies, for example S3 and S6, the notion of 'competing' seemed to underpin the work of the governing body and how it was construed. They appeared to be 'fighting' an external enemy of some kind, not always unproductively or with problematic/negative outcomes. The interchanges at the governing body meeting at S8, a school in a very disadvantaged area, at times gave that impression.

The notion of 'ambition' appeared to link with the idea of competition – 'How do we want our school to be?' Answer: 'As good as it can be and better than others'. 'How we will know when that is the case?' Answer: 'When it's very highly thought of and fairly treated'. However, there was also evidence that governing bodies had a view that they had a significant interest in the education of all the young people in the area, not just those attending their particular school.

Appointing the headteacher

For a number of the governing bodies, for example P6, S9, S6 and S8, appointing a new headteacher had been a significant task, as these examples illustrate.

- The task of headteacher appointment had been particularly important at P10. It had been the most significant and pre-occupying task of the incoming ChGB. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the leadership of P10 at the level of the headteacher and by the governing body had drifted and lost focus. The new ChGB and a small number of experienced governors, who had been appointed as governors on an interim basis, appointed a headteacher to make changes and to take the school in a different direction.
- At S5, a former ChGB recalled that she along with a number of experienced governors had managed the appointment of the new headteacher. The appointment was made when the previous headteacher, who had been in post 20 years, had retired. His retirement coincided with the retirement of a number of members of the senior leadership team, which complicated the appointment process. In addition, the appointment procedures had to be developed afresh. This task *"took a huge amount of time."*
- At P6, the governing body felt they wanted a headteacher with a very different style and approach and with different priorities. The governors felt the school

needed a change. Interestingly, the appointment coincided with the appointment of a new ChGB who thus took up the responsibility at a difficult time. However, by all accounts she had risen to the challenge. She was both a parent and a very experienced manager in a company in the locality. According to the ChGB, the previous headteacher had a very child-centred perspective on education and an *“avuncular approach to headship”*. SATs results were not of a concern to him, the buildings were not maintained as well as they could have been, and the school website was dull and uninformative. As a result, the school, which was in a very advantaged area from a socio-economic standpoint, was not popular locally. In the words of the headteacher: *“We had a lot of second choice children.”* The ChGB felt a new headteacher should have *“more of an eye to the SEF and Ofsted.”* The new headteacher had *“said all the right things”* at interview according to the ChGB at interview and had proved to be a good appointment. However, one of the governors at the school was very disappointed with the support from the local authority during the appointment process.

Ensuring a secure understanding of the task when there are changes to governing body membership

Ensuring that the task of governing is widely understood by all the members of the governing body is continual and constant work because of the turnover of governors. This concern was evident at S6 and at S9. Where there are substantial changes to the governing body, ensuring that the task is collectively understood is particularly difficult. For example, at P8, where the development of the governing body was a priority, the arrival of three new governors complicated the development task. There was evidence at S5 of the negative effect of a substantial turnover of governing body members on the way the governing body understood the task of governing and worked on it.

4.3.4 Processes

The difficulty of governing

There was considerable evidence to support the view that governing was complex and difficult.

- At S14, the headteacher felt governing was:
“challenging. We are a National Challenge school which brings lots of pressures. We are due to be amalgamated and achieve academy status soon, which brings big pressures in all sorts of ways. Our roll is also falling.”
- A governor at P10 felt it was *“difficult to do the job when you’re not involved in it day to day, too much is expected of governing bodies.”*
- The very capable and experienced ChGB at S9 was clear: *“Governing is getting harder.”* She referred to the lack of time, the volume of paperwork and legal constraints.

- The S13 ChGB was definite that *“having too many things to deal with”* hindered the way the governing body worked.
- At P2, a school in a disadvantaged setting, the ChGB felt the task was challenging because *“the school is doing well already”* and that it would be easy to *“sit back and be complacent”*.

A number of the schools in the study were emerging from a difficult period which added to the complications and difficulty of the governing task. Several, for example S12, S6 and P5, were emerging from a period in special measures and/or had had a number of headteachers, acting headteachers or interim headteachers of some kind in a relatively short period of time.

Governing body organisation

There was considerable evidence that governing bodies and the work of governing needs to be well organised. Further and somewhat obviously, the better the governing body leadership, management and administration, the better the governing. Very straightforward things like receiving the paperwork well before the meeting made a big difference. At some meetings we observed, uncertainty about straightforward administration matters clearly hindered the governing process. For example, at the P15 governing body meeting, there was uncertainty about whether all the governors had received all the papers for the meeting. It was not clear whether the minutes of the governing body committee meetings were to be sent to the clerk.

The role of the chair of the governing body

The role of the ChGB was complex.

- It involved organising the governing body and chairing the meetings.
- The ChGB was important in all aspects of governing: recruitment, induction, training, organisation; the management of the meetings. As the ChGB of S10 put it: *“Ensuring the governing body does its job”*. He felt an important part of this work was *“oiling the wheels”*. The ChGB at S4 felt one of the main aspects of his role was *“to keep the whole GB on track (with the HT) and up to date”* (Field notes).
- Very importantly, the ChGB role involved establishing and maintaining a close joint working relationship with the headteacher.

High quality ChGB-headteacher relationships were particularly evident at P7, P13 and at P16. The relationship at P16 was characterised as *“professional respect between them. They have a good working relationship”* (Field notes). The ChGB at S10 felt that an important part of his work was *“being there for the head, being supportive, talking things through, acting as a sounding board”*.

There was evidence that an effective and expert ChGB can bring about a radical change in the constitution and ways of working of the governing body. At S2 and P10, the ChGB had played a pivotal role in changing the governing body.

There was also evidence that the ChGB can be instrumental in turning a school around. The commitment and leadership of the ChGB is particularly significant

if a school goes into special measures. Leadership for the school may not be present. Indeed the lack of leadership may be what has caused the school's underperformance in the first place. These examples illustrate the role of the ChGB in these circumstances.

- At S7, the ChGB was a former councillor with a very strong and impressive personality. The school had been significantly under-performing. He had played a major role in removing the former headteacher from his post. The new headteacher had been appointed. The school was inspected by Ofsted shortly after the appointment and was given a notice to improve. The governing body provided support for the headteacher when difficult decisions following the Ofsted inspection outcome needed to be made.
- At P4, the school had faced a budgetary crisis. It was in part a problem that had arisen through the requirement to fund increasing levels of support staff for English language support. The student body had changed. It had become more ethnically diverse over time. In fact though, the school needed a change in the orientation of the teaching force, not just more funding. The members of the support staff were doing what the teachers should have been doing in supporting language learning. The teachers as a group were heavily unionised, militant and resigned to and de-motivated by having to teach in challenging circumstances. The previous headteacher had found the conflicts with the staff exhausting. The new headteacher, who was the previous deputy headteacher, was appointed. The appointment process was led by the two key governors – the ChGB and the vice-chair. The ChGB and the vice-chair and the newly appointed headteacher had been instrumental in *'turning the school around,'* as the most recent Ofsted report indicated.
- S13 is situated in a poor multi-ethnic area of a large city and has a long-standing reputation for low academic standards. It is effectively a girls' secondary modern school and at the time of the data collection was federated with the local girls' grammar school. The headteacher said that the governing body was *"fantastic – absolutely brilliant."* The ChGB had worked in education in the tertiary sector. He was a Labour councillor and was deputy education spokesperson on the council, which was considered to be very beneficial. The school was the focus of a considerable amount of development work. Much of this development had been initiated by the acting headteacher, who had taken over from a long-standing incumbent, and the governing body meetings felt *"very energised"* (Field notes).
- The newly appointed ChGB at P8 was inexperienced in chairing governing bodies but knowledgeable and experienced in management. He was instrumental in helping to improve the school when it was given a notice to improve following an Ofsted inspection. In his view, the headteacher *"was stepping up to the mark"*. Coincidentally, there had been a substantial influx of parents to the school's governing body.

- At S5, the former ChGB gave a vivid account of her experience of attempting to move the school forward. She felt that the school was “*coasting; it had all become very cosy*”. She and the strategy group (chairs of the various committees) organised an ‘away day’. She said:

“We asked the headteacher, ‘What’s your strategy for the school?’ ‘Where do you want it to be in five years time?’”

She also supported him in the dismissal of a head of faculty on competency grounds.

There was evidence that a ‘reluctant ChGB’, for example as at P5, can be very damaging to the leadership of the school and can impede efforts to bring about improvement.

The benefits of close and productive working relationships between the headteachers and the ChGB were very evident in the data. Indeed, this relationship appeared to be pivotal in the governance of the school. There was evidence of joint working on a very wide range of matters.

The relationship was very difficult to characterise but there is no doubt that the leadership of the school was considerably strengthened when it was of high quality. During the data collection, we often had the opportunity to see the headteacher and the ChGB interacting. The quality of interactions was typically of an extremely high quality – business-like, serious, good humoured, warm, valuing, genuine and positive. The notion of openness, especially on the part of the headteacher, appeared to be seen as a significant strength by those who felt the headteacher-ChGB relationship was strong.

- The headteacher at P8 was very complimentary about the ChGB – he had “*belief in the school and in me*” which was “*brilliantly unwavering*”.
- At P12, the headteacher had been in post four years and was a “*local appointment*” (Field notes) and the ChGB had been a governor for about nine years. A real strength of the governance of the school was their similarity of views on a range of important educational matters. The most powerful shared view was that the disadvantage experienced by the pupils should not be an excuse for poor achievement. They gave a strong sense that “*standards are everything*” (Field notes). This perspective was deemed to be important for the pupils and their parents but also for the secondary schools that the pupils would be going on to.
- The importance of openness was important in the relationship. It was certainly the case at P13. At S4 the headteacher, discussing the importance of being open with what was happening in the school, was definite: “*The governing body shouldn’t have any surprises.*”
- At P13 both the headteacher and the ChGB felt that trust was important. Similar sentiments were expressed at P2.

The governing body at P1 had two co-ChGBs, an arrangement which appeared to work well. They shared the same view of the school, were both highly committed to the school, and both had excellent working relationships with the headteacher. They chaired alternate meetings of the full governing body. Importantly, these co-ChGBs appeared to gain authority from each other and had successfully created “*demanding governing*” (Field notes) at the school. They felt that this style of governing was characterised by “*high standards and expectations of governors*” (Field notes).

Chairing the meetings, especially meetings of the full governing body, could be a formidable task. It is especially daunting if the business to be covered was substantial, if there was to be adequate scrutiny, and if the meeting was to be concluded in a timely manner. This high quality chairing was evident at S9 and particularly so at P2, where the meeting that was observed had 19 items and the minutes of the previous meeting ran to 14 pages. However, brisk, businesslike chairing was not valued by all the governors we interviewed. Some felt that it shortened the time available for longer discussions and scrutiny of substantive issues.

Many ChGBs had been governors for a considerable period at their schools. For example, the ChGB at S4 had been on the governing body for ten years and six years as ChGB. He had previously been chair of the finance committee. Further, being ChGB was a substantial undertaking. The S10 ChGB was clear that “*he wouldn’t have taken it on if he hadn’t been retiring.*” For him as ChGB of a very large secondary school:

“It takes a significant amount of time. I get an email about it every day and send about four a day about this and that. It would be difficult to do if you weren’t in the area during the day.”

Failures in the governing process

We did not witness any examples of poor governing practice. However, we did hear a number of examples of weak governing that had occurred in the past.

The lack of scrutiny can result in weak governing. For example, at P14, according to the new ChGB, the previous headteacher felt he was doing a good job. However, the school was drifting into difficulties, which an Ofsted inspection revealed. The problems were exacerbated because the governing body simply “*rubber-stamped*” the headteacher’s decisions. This “*rubber-stamping*” had also been a feature of governing at another school, P15, in the headteacher’s view.

Weak governing may not be important when the headteacher is capable, and/or rapid improvements are required, as these examples illustrate.

- The headteacher at S12 had implemented a number of changes in the school although governing body processes remained weak. She had only recently turned her attention to enhancing the quality of the governing body some while after she had implemented much needed changes. Interestingly, this ‘late

involvement' appeared to have resulted in tensions and conflicts in the governing body and in particular how it saw its role and responsibilities.

- At P12, there had been a failure of collective governance in the past which had been rectified. In the past the governance of the school has not been strong. The field notes report:

"The head has been in post about 4 years and wasn't previously involved with the school. Prior to that time the school had been 'a good school' but had been 'run into the ground' (ChGB) by the former head who sounds like he ran the school without regard to governance. The ChGB has been involved for about 9 years and was a parent governor originally, then a community governor and eventually chair about 18 months ago. Soon after the HT arrived the school was Ofsteded and put into special measures for two years. This was a pivotal event and set the school in its current successful position."

The ChGB felt the governing body under the previous headteacher had been *"frightened to voice opinions"*. Governors were only involved on a *"need to know basis"*. Since that time, 60% of the governing body had changed and the ChGB felt that the governing body had become much more open. The current headteacher and the ChGB and the governing body have a strong working relationship.

Where and when does governing take place?

Much of the governing process takes place outside the formal meetings in a range of settings and in different ways. Some schools, for example, S7, had annual business planning 'away weekends'. These enabled a dialogue between the ChGB and the senior staff from which *"strategic thinking emerged"* (ChGB). In many instances, ChGBs and chairs of committees were often in school to discuss matters with the headteacher. There was clear evidence that much of the governing process took place in these 'between meeting' encounters. There were informal meetings of core groups and chairs of committees. Ideas were developed, proposals were shaped and strategies were clarified. Furthermore, committee meetings were where a large amount of the debate and decision-making took place. This way of working may explain the general consensual nature of many of the meetings of the full governing bodies we observed.

Meeting processes

Wide participation in debate was viewed positively, for example at S8. Some meetings we observed were positive and good humoured, for example S10. They were extremely so in some instances, for example, P11 and P13 where there was much laughter and banter.

Lack of participation in decisions may cause difficulties. For example, at P10, the budget had been decided by the previous headteacher and the ChGB *"in private"*. *They ran the school as a private fiefdom* (ChGB). They forecast a budget deficit of £150k but the incoming ChGB, after the headteacher and the existing ChGB resigned, found a £120k surplus.

The discourse at governing body meetings is often ‘white middle class’, which can be a significant impediment to participation by minority ethnic groups, as was the case, for example, at P4.

Pupil learning and the pupil learning experience often substantively underpinned the debates, as was the case at P11. However, other issues may divert attention to very detrimental effect as we have already discussed. At the P10 full governing body meeting we observed, the ChGB gave a lucid summary of a discussion on teaching pupils with special educational needs. It linked educational impact with finance and ended with “*So, where is it we can best target additional resources?*”

Participation at the meetings varied considerably. The headteacher was often much in evidence and chairs of committees often spoke at length about ‘their items’ on the agenda. In some instances, only a small number of members actively contributed during meetings. It often took a while for some members to participate at a meeting. For example, at the P10 full governing body meeting, three governors had not spoken after one hour. Similar lack of participation was evident at other meetings we observed.

Meeting processes are not always smooth and straightforward.

- At S11, there was evidence of an “*arrogant response*” (Field notes) by one governor when there was a difference of views.
- At S12 the atmosphere was slightly tense. “*Discussion was closed down*” (Field notes) and there appeared to be a ‘them and us’ feeling in the governing body between the staff and the lay members. Governing body members arrived late and others departed early, events that were not acknowledged by the ChGB. In this governing body, the headteacher appeared to be “*silenced, disabled and diminished*” (Field notes) by the general tone of the meeting, which seemed to result in a ‘non-collaborative stance’ by her. The staff governors seemed to be in competition with the lay members and exchanges were “*not particularly respectful*” (Field notes). There was a “*feeling that the governors and the school are not on the same side*” (Field notes). At this meeting, some members of the governing body “*talked through other people*” (Field notes). Field notes report that the meeting “*significantly over-runs*” its scheduled duration.
- A discussion of the finances at S5 was very complex and some strong views were exchanged. However, the discussion was well mannered and respectful and though the discussion was lengthy, the issue under debate was resolved.

Due procedures were always followed at meetings with, for example, a request for ‘declarations of interest’ at the start of meetings. This proper approach was often part of very relaxed meeting processes. So, for example at S13, the ChGB felt that it was important that meetings were “*not too procedural*” and at the same time there made “*efficient use of people’s time*”. There was evidence that members themselves were very alert to discussions where there might be a conflict of interest.

The general similarity in meeting processes between primary and secondary governing bodies emerged as a significant theme in the data analysis. Meeting processes were broadly similar. However, ‘out of meeting’ processes such as involvement in the day-to-day life of the school did appear to be different, with primary governors more involved in the life of the school.

At S9, there was a very positive atmosphere at the meeting with a free-flowing discussion. The ChGB characterised the relationships in the governing body and at meetings as: *“an informal relationship with a formal backbone”*. However, a governor at S9 felt that the process did not engage fully enough. The governors were short of information and the School Improvement Partner (SIP) did not attend.

In some of the governing bodies, for example S11 and P10, changes to the ChGB and vice-chair and other changes to the membership of the governing body had made a significant difference to the governing process. At S11, a new chair, who worked in higher education, and the vice-chair, who was a former university vice chancellor, had changed the ethos of the governing body from one of *“unquestioning”* to one of *“scrutiny”*. There was a general consensus amongst the interviewees that the way the governing body worked now was to *“provide direction, spell out consequences of failure, straight talking”* (ChGB).

Review of performance

The governing bodies had a wide and sophisticated view of performance. For example at S6, they had an all-embracing view: *“Results; extra curricular provision; and how the pupils develop as people and as members of the community”* (Field notes). However, inevitably, pupil academic performance and attendance were dominant concerns. At S1, a grammar school, the governors had a general sense of performance. It was not just results but *“results were in the foreground”* (Headteacher). Similarly, at S14, a National Challenge school, the headteacher felt ‘the performance of the school’ encompassed:

“Exam results – inevitably, as a National Challenge school, we have no choice but to put all our efforts into academic performance. We are also in a selective system here.”

However, the headteacher also felt that *“governors are still interested in other social/ personal achievements – the ECM (Every Child Matters) agenda.”*

Governors in disadvantaged settings in particular, such as P2, appeared to have a complex view of performance. The ChGB said his central interest was:

“Value added. Our kids start low and have to achieve more than they would (in more advantaged settings) and emotional intelligence and personal and social skills.”

The governing body at P2 sought information about the performance of the school from a range of sources on which to base their judgements. The ChGB attended most meetings with the SIP, they used RAISEonline data, and *“I’m in touch with the LA (local authority)”*. The ChGB said he: *“picked up things from the parents and*

staff.” Importantly for him: *“The head is open, she knows I want to hear bad news from her.”* He appeared to have a problem-seeking orientation and an eagerness to learn. These characteristics were reflected in his perspective on a recent complaint about the school by a parent. He said: *“It was an opportunity to hear what she (the complainant) had to say.”* Openness, particularly in relation to the performance of the school was deemed to be particularly important.

The work of the SIP was important in many instances but there was evidence that governing bodies were in the process of coming to understand the usefulness of the SIP. In many instances but by no means all, the SIP attended meetings of the full governing body. At P10, where there had been failures in the governing process, the SIP report *“was under-used in the past”*. However, it was *“now used for monitoring and evaluation”* (ChGB).

Good data management appeared to be very important in supporting the governing process. There was evidence that a *“school can slip into decline if data management is not strong”* (Field notes from P7).

A number of schools such as P8 and P15 used the Financial Management Standards in Schools (<http://www.fmsis.info/>) including the section for governors, to support their scrutiny of financial matters.

Consideration of the performance of the school in areas of socio-economic challenge could be especially difficult, as was the case for example at S6. Governing could be particularly challenging when a school is given notice to improve as it was with S11. At this school, governing in any event was seen as challenging: *“Secondary schools are complex”* (ChGB). However, there was also evidence that governors in successful schools in advantaged settings, such as S1, were aware that they *“cannot afford to be complacent”* (ChGB). The headteacher at S1, a grammar school said: *“To lose your reputation for excellence is unthinkable and the governors know that.”*

In some schools, consideration of performance data can come to dominate in governing body meetings.

- The ChGB at S14 felt: *“Our governing body meetings are full of data and discussion about the school's performance.”*
- At S12, the discussion at a full governing body we observed centred very powerfully on targets. The school's plan to raise attainment had been highly commended.
- The full RAISEonline report was reviewed at the full governing body meeting at S13. A document covering two sides of A4 of ‘headlines’ from the report was provided at the meeting to draw governors’ attention to particular issues.
- At P9, a primary school, the school's Self-evaluation Form was displayed on a projector for the whole meeting and was frequently referred to. However, the governors of this school, which was in a disadvantaged, post-industrial setting, viewed performance much more broadly than results in SATs tests. Indeed the whole approach of the school seemed to be the provision of a whole range of

enrichment activities such as an “*active sports – e.g. touch rugby – and an arts programme*” (Field notes).

Discussion in meetings

From our observations, it was clear that discussions at meetings, for example the debate about finance and pupil numbers at P11, may have considerable depth. This depth was typically an outcome of detailed scrutiny. In many instances, the ChGB had a prominent role in ensuring that discussions were good-humoured, thorough and concluded wisely. The discussion of the malfunctioning electricity meter at P11 which had led to the school being under-charged for a long period, an error which had just come to light and had to be rectified, was, for example, wisely managed by the ChGB.

Parent governors, especially in disadvantaged areas and those who are new to the role, may need time to settle in and to participate. A governor at P3, who was very well qualified and had run his own business, reminded the interviewer that the education jargon “*can be very intimidating to an outsider*”. This view was confirmed by the headteacher at P4: “*The education language is not understandable*”. Some of the matters discussed can be very complicated, for example the discussion of the finances of support for meeting special educational needs at P3.

There were examples of discussions being slow to gather pace and to ‘get going’. The discussion of the SIP report at P10 was ultimately thorough and detailed but at the outset was rather slow and faltering.

Staff governors can make a very significant contribution to the discussions, adding information, clarifying and explaining. There were examples in governors’ meetings at S11 and S6 of staff governors being specifically asked to make inputs and to provide perspectives. These were well done and greatly appreciated by other members of the governing body. At P10, the deputy headteacher contradicted the headteacher, although the intervention was not problematic. Indeed it helped the meeting processes and enabled a fuller discussion, which the headteacher acknowledged.

Ensuring participation can be a continual challenge. For example, at S14, the ChGB expressed his frustration:

“I can’t understand the governors who come to meetings and say nothing whatever I try to get them to contribute.”

He was referring mainly to the parent members of the governing body. In this governing body, which was quite large, approximately 20 governors in total, only half the governing body were the active participants in the meeting.

Decision-making

Votes were rare in the governing bodies we observed. The decision making processes at governing body meetings appeared to be highly consensual. Very few votes were observed. As the S9 ChGB reported: “*I don’t think there’s ever*

been a vote, it's never not unanimous." This finding indicated the widespread use of discussion and debate outside the governing body meetings, and extensive consultation prior to any meetings, or a widely shared view of what are appropriate courses of action. At the S5 full governing body meeting where there was a vote, there was evidence that 'outside-meeting processes' had not been secure. In this instance, the work of the finance committee had been hampered by the way the budgetary information had been presented. The S8 governing body used a sophisticated pupil consultation process, which the ChGB felt was *"very helpful in informing decision-making"*.

Link governors

Link governors can work well *"but are not always productive"* (ChGB of S8). Their links tended to be with subjects or departments in secondaries and class or year based in primaries but that was not always the case and they were also linked to themes such as inclusion. There were numerous examples of interesting link governor practice.

- At S8, a secondary school, governors attended one department meeting a term.
- Link governors at P1, a primary school, undertook classroom observation. They reported back on a standard form, which allowed the governors to report back and to give feedback to the full governing body.
- At S9, the link governor arrangements appeared to work well. Link governors had direct contact with the heads of departments. The ChGB felt that *"link governors act as change agents"* supporting change initiatives.
- Link governor visits to the school at P10 focused on aspects of the school development plan. As a governor at the school put it: *"All governors should be working (with staff in the school) with the SDP, then the whole GB experiences it."* This approach of linking governors to improvement objectives was also used at P13. Governors were expected to comment when their part of the School Development Plan or Self-evaluation Form (SEF) was discussed at a governors' meeting.
- At P14, where there was a new headteacher and efforts were being made to improve governing body processes, the headteacher had initiated a system of lesson visits for governors.

Committees of the governing body

The committees of the governing body emerged as a very significant aspect of school governing.

The work of committees of the governing body can be important in ensuring governing body effectiveness.

Committees can enable scrutiny of an aspect of the school's work in depth. At S6, the headteacher had a definite view: *"Committees, that's where the real work goes on. Debate followed by decision."* At P8, the headteacher was clear that *"good, effective subcommittees"* helped the governing body to function well. In some ways,

committees appeared to be as important as the full governing body, if not more so, in some instances. It was in the committees that scrutiny was detailed and decisions were made. The contribution of the core group (see above) to committee work can be important in the functioning of the governing body. Where committees worked well or were seen as strengths, for example at S6, they were well chaired and well serviced by the headteacher or members of the school leadership team. The ChGB at S9 felt that committees, when well led and managed, “*prevent double debating*” where significant issues would be debated in the committee and again in the full governing body meeting. When a governing body is going through a period of development, the committee system can take time to bed down, as we heard at P14.

The chairs of committees were significant players in many of the schools.

The chairs of committees were typically significant governing body members. For example, in some instances the chairs were members of the governing body ‘inner cabinet’. Such groups may meet to review the school in depth perhaps relatively infrequently but nonetheless with important outcomes. At S5, when a change of strategy had been required several years ago, the chairs of the committees had formed a strategy group to drive the process forward. In another instance, the governing body was developing after a period of difficulty in the school and with the governing body. The chairs of the committees had met as a ‘strategy group’ and had been particularly active in enabling the members of the governing body to understand that “*asking questions is the helpful thing to do*” (Headteacher). At S11, the ChGB and the chairs of the committees “*provide very good leadership*” (Headteacher).

Arrangements for committees varied.

The arrangement for committees varied across the sample. For example, the governing body of S13, a secondary school, had two committees: ‘People and money’ and ‘Students, learning and assessment’ and many governors were on both. The governing body of P3, a primary school, had four committees: ‘Finance’, ‘Staffing’, ‘Monitoring and assessment’ and ‘Premises’ with a number of smaller ad hoc groups. Some schools had more than four committees. At S9, there was a governor effectiveness group, which monitored governing processes. There were indications that this group had been established as a way of including and using the enthusiasm of keen governors.

At P6, the headteacher admitted that he had set up “*an alternative governing body*” as a working group to manage much-needed changes to the school buildings. In his view, the governing body was very “*stick in the mud*”. The ChGB felt that the school was in “*a very conservative area*” and it would have resisted the required changes.

The relationship between the committees and the full governing body varied and was a matter of interest.

There were indications that careful chairing was required to prevent the full governing body “*picking away at specific issues emerging from committees and more towards asking more strategic questions*” (ChGB). At P12 for example, the Personnel and Finances committee meeting was attended by seven governors. There was a high

degree of challenge and due processes were followed. For example, the financial statement was signed off in accordance with the local authority regulations. However, the field notes report that *“no decisions were made at all – where this looked likely (that is, a decision would be made) it was decided to defer to the FGB.”*

Another different kind of problem with the ‘committee model’ of governing was that there was a tendency to ‘nod through’ committee decisions without adequate scrutiny by the full governing body. Some governors we interviewed raised this matter as a potential problem but we did not observe it happening in practice.

There were examples of where the committee arrangements were changed to improve efficiency or to give a message about the nature of their work.

At S13 they had reduced the number of committees to two to improve efficiency. The headteacher at P15 had changed the name of the Curriculum committee to *“the Curriculum and Standards committee”* (the headteacher’s emphasis) in order to encourage the members of the governing body to be more concerned about the scrutiny of standards. At P6, there was a Diocesan committee which oversaw matters relating to the religious designation of the school.

Effective committee work was in evidence in both primary school settings and secondaries.

There was evidence in the data of effective committee work in both primary school governing bodies, for example P3 and P12, and secondary school governing bodies, for example S9.

There was no evidence from our admittedly small sample of case study schools that committees were different in primary and secondary school, or that committee working was contingent upon the socio-economic context or the performance of the school.

In-school presence and involvement of governors

The in-school presence/involvement of governors was significant and could be quite substantial, as these examples illustrate.

- The S9 ChGB was often in school, and occasionally attended the daily staff briefing. He was involved in enterprise events and mentoring pupils. He and other governors *“take on the scally-wags”* as he put it.
- Governors at P3 were *“often in the school”*.
- At the P8, governing body meeting, governors were urged to visit the school, to become engaged with the school, and *“to get to know people”* (ChGB).
- The field notes for P9 noted a *“very present GB – in very often”* to indicate the close and frequent contact the members of the governing body had with the school.

Relationships for governance

Sound relationships were considered to be very important in the school governing process. The very relaxed exchanges and processes in meetings we observed,

for example at P14, P11 and P1, indicated secure relationships rather than weak processes. At P10, where governing body had to be 're-built', a governor said:

"Building relationships has been very important" (governor) and "governors have to work hard at creating relationships with all stakeholders."

The members of the governing body may be at the centre of a wide network of informal contacts as was the case at P2. These relationships appeared to support and link the governors with a range of stakeholders.

As already discussed, a key relationship is the one between the headteacher and the ChGB. However, staff-governor relationships were also important, as was the case for example at P13. At S11, those we interviewed felt that these relationships between governors and members of staff were central to governing body effectiveness.

Relationships with local authority

Relationships with the local authority were of interest, as we have discussed earlier. The local authority governor role was variously undertaken and in a somewhat uncertain manner. There was evidence that governing body members were nominated as local authority members but were that in name only. There were examples where a local councillor would be the local authority member but would attend infrequently and/or not engage fully with the process. There was very little evidence of the role being worked with formally by governing bodies. For example, there was no standing item entitled 'local authority matters' or contact with the local authority through briefings for local authority governors. These reservations should not be interpreted as underperformance in particular by local authority governors. For example, at S13 the local authority governor was a very effective ChGB.

Governing body clerks, if from the local authority team, were useful in providing links to and with the local authority, as was the case at P2.

In some governing body meetings, such as at P15's, the local authority was viewed somewhat as 'the enemy' which 'required the governing body to do things', such as to review a particular policy. Similarly, at S4, a successful foundation school, there appeared to be antagonism between the governing body and the local authority on the allocation of school places.

Scrutiny

Scrutiny work by the governing body was observed to very have a powerful effect in enabling decisions/information/plans to be the focus of debate rather than individuals such as the headteacher or the chair of a committee presenting a policy to the full governing body. The following points illustrate the various aspects of the scrutiny process.

1. There were examples of staff governors taking the lead in the scrutiny of pupil performance data for example, in the scrutiny of the SIP report at P10.
2. There was evidence that scrutiny can enhance the quality of decision-making, and that rehearsing the justification for a decision assertively strengthens

leadership and management rather than undermining it. At P11, for example, the headteacher was flexible, secure and relaxed in response to scrutiny about an issue relating to the Self-evaluation Form without losing authority. In fact she appeared to gain authority through the process.

3. The scrutiny of pupil performance featured in the meetings observed. In good governing bodies, the capability to scrutinise data was a strength, as was the case at S2. However, at one meeting (S9) the data were presented in complex form rather late to the whole meeting which did not enable a full scrutiny. The ChGB indicated that the data would be scrutinised by a committee which would report back to the full governing body and there would be further discussion.
4. As already discussed, scrutiny processes can be helped by the presence of a high level of expertise in data analysis. There were examples of this expertise coming from the staff, such as the headteacher or member of staff responsible for data management, and a governor or governors who are able and willing to scrutinise the data.
5. There was evidence that the SIP report was useful as a performance analysis tool.
6. A readiness to ask questions at all levels was important in the scrutiny process. For example, at P10, governors asked very simple questions about what the various acronyms meant. Other members clearly welcomed the explanation and it appeared to open up a wider discussion beyond the acronym's meaning.
7. Some governors adopted a very clear and almost deliberate scrutiny approach. For example, at P10 one governor prefaced her question with: *"In order for me to carry out my role as a governor . . ."*
8. A high level of scrutiny can create a very positive atmosphere, for example at P10. It generated a sense of reassurance, and comfort that the right decisions had been made.
9. At S9, the core group (see above) had considerable expertise in scrutiny. This scrutiny by a small group was also a feature of the governing body processes at P10. At S14 the ChGB felt: *"Many governors ask probing questions but by no means all."*
10. P8 had experienced a recent decline in its performance. It been given notice to improve by Ofsted to which it had successfully responded. The headteacher felt that in the past *"the governors trusted the school too much; they could have asked more searching and critical questions."*
11. There was evidence in one governing body, where budgetary matters were not fully discussed, that the governing body was not exercising its full scrutiny responsibility on financial matters.
12. At P15, the level of scrutiny was observed to be relatively low. The headteacher's report, which covered pupil performance issues and target setting, was received in silence. *"No questions asked, the staff governor confirms that the targets have been agreed by the LA"* (Field notes). As the headteacher put it during a subsequent interview, they are: *"all very nice people but they don't challenge me enough"*. At the meeting of the full governing body of this school, there was however, detailed scrutiny of:

- financial matters; as the headteacher put it, the chair of the Finance Committee who is extremely committed to his responsibilities, “*picks up on the detail of finance, the pernickety things*”
- the securing of an events licence for the use of the school premises after hours
- the refurbishment of the school kitchen
- the pupil road-crossing outside the school entrance.

However, a governor interviewed subsequently felt that this lack of scrutiny of the headteacher’s report was unusual. Pupil performance data and its scrutiny usually featured more prominently.

13. The meeting at S5 did not discuss the report of the School Improvement Partner in substantial depth.
14. At S5 there was a lengthy discussion about the management of the Year 11 leaving date and process. Arguably, this was an operational matter. However, underpinning the discussion was a sense of ‘what does the way it was managed convey about our values and the kind of school we want?’
15. The S10 headteacher appeared to help the scrutiny process by posing questions for the lay members of the governing body following the presentation of his report.

The role of the headteacher in governing

Headteachers typically took a central role in the meetings, for example at P11 and S9. The openness of the headteacher was a factor in ensuring good governing. It was specifically mentioned as a factor that ensured the effective working of the governing body on a number of occasions, for example at P13. At P1, the ChGB reported to the full governing body meeting that the headteacher had been very open about the dilemma she felt she was in about the proposed SATs boycott.

The role and responsibilities of the clerk

There were varied arrangements for the administration of the governing body by the clerk. In some instances, for example at S2, P6, S3, P7 and S10, the clerk was a member of the school administrative staff. However, in other instances, for example at P13 and P2, the clerks were part of a professional team who undertook the work as part of a service level agreement between the school and the local authority. There was no evidence that the in-house clerk model was consistently worse than the ‘professional’ clerk model. For example, at P16, the clerk worked at the school and was just a clerk for that one school governing body. She was referred to as “*fastidious*” by the ChGB, especially about the organisation of elections for parent governors. “*The ballot boxes were only opened with the candidates present*” (Field notes). In the meeting, the clerk was assigned particular and specific information gathering tasks for the governing body. There was evidence in other cases that weak clerking led to some inefficiencies. The central message was that effective clerking can be a considerable help to the governing process.

4.3.5 The case studies and governing in primary and secondary schools; socio-economic context and performance

Governing in primary and secondary schools

In this part, we consider the findings on school governing in primary schools and in secondary schools and, in so doing, seek to contrast governing in those different settings. We group the discussion under the headings: the context, the antecedents, the governing task, governing processes and the effects.

The context

From the case study data, the influence of the context on governing was broadly similar for primary schools and secondary schools. It varied in comparable dimensions and in very similar ways. Generally, governing in both primary and secondary schools was more challenging in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. However, these effects could be moderated by the success of the school and the esteem in which it was held. The institutional connections for governance may also have an influence. For example, secondary schools may have closer links with businesses and other institutions, such as universities or hospitals.

The antecedents

There was evidence to support the assertion that it may be more difficult to recruit parent governors to secondary school governing bodies because the governing of a secondary school may be deemed to:

- be more complex and problematical
- be connected with more recent and not so attractive images for potential governors
- be concerned with much larger institutions.

However, any effects of this kind may be hidden by other factors, such as the degree of proactivity in the recruitment of governors.

Motivations to join primary and secondary school governing bodies as lay members were likely to be different. The parent-child-school relationship was different, which may affect the motivations of parent governors. Primary and secondary schools were likely to link to their communities in different ways and have different kinds and numbers of potential governors available to them. Potential primary school parent governors appeared to visit the school more regularly (to collect their children, for example) and be better known to the headteacher.

The governing task

There was no discernible difference between primary school and secondary school governors in how they described the task. Both used a similar range of ways of describing the task. Support seemed to be implicit in their descriptions. We did not witness any direct challenging of the headteacher by lay members in either setting, or any explicit calling to account. Scrutiny in its various guises tended to vary similarly in both settings. As we have already described above, school governing in secondary schools was viewed as more complicated, concerned with larger institutions and perhaps distant from the classroom, than governing in primary schools.

Governing processes

Governing processes did not appear to be contingent on phase. It was not the case that primary school governing bodies worked in a particular way that was different from secondary school governing bodies. However, they did have a different scope. Matters were discussed at primary school governing bodies which would probably not reach that level in a secondary school, for example, the arrangement of teaching groups, methods, teaching assistant recruitment and so on.

There was evidence that primaries may lack specialist functional expertise within the organisation and may look to governors with that specialist expertise to undertake those functions rather than to just scrutinise those functions.

Governing in primary schools appeared to involve and take advantage of more informal contacts. Parent networks seemed to be closer, for example parents often met at the school gates and headteachers may have frequent contact with parent governors in the way they may not in secondary schools.

Any differences between primary schools and secondary schools in governing processes appeared to reflect the (typical) size of the institution (primary – small) and the age of the pupils (primary – younger). Managerial approaches to governing in primaries seemed to feel less appropriate. Secondary school governing bodies may be deemed to be more business-like.

The general similarity in meeting processes between primary and secondary governing bodies emerged as a significant theme in the data analysis. Meeting processes were broadly similar. However, ‘out of meeting’ processes such as involvement in the day-to-day life of the school did appear to be different. Primary school governors were perhaps ‘in school’ more than their secondary school counterparts.

Effects

The secondary schools we studied were larger organisations with bigger budgets, more staff and more pupils. School governing was typically ‘more distant’, with less potential to lever influence on school matters. Primary governors were much more likely to be in the school and in the classrooms. This appeared to enable them to know more clearly how the school was going from the standpoint of the teachers, support staff and for children/students. Primary schools may be more easily influenced by governance than secondary schools.

School governing and socio-economic status

Here we summarise the findings on school governing in high and low socio-economic status contexts and contrast governing in those different contexts. We group the discussion under the headings: the context, the antecedents, the governing task, governing processes and the effects.

The context

Socio-economic status appeared to influence governing because high levels of socio-economic disadvantage reduced the number of people with the capability and motivation to act as lay school governors. However, the effect could be moderated by: institutional linkages; proactivity in seeking out and 'nurturing' potential governors; the success of the school; and the esteem/affection in which it was held.

The antecedents

Recruiting parents to be governors in low socio-economic status contexts appeared to be more difficult than in high socio-economic status contexts especially in secondary schools.

Schools in low socio-economic status settings seemed to attract more potential governors who have an 'interests of others' motivation.

Schools in high socio-economic status settings appeared to find it easier to attract governors and may therefore have a larger pool of appropriate governors to choose from.

Any effects of socio-economic status on the recruitment of governors with the right kind of capability could be hidden by other factors such as the degree of proactivity of governing bodies in recruiting governors.

The governing task

There was no discernible difference between the way governors in high socio-economic status settings and low socio-economic status settings construed the task. Both used a range of ways of describing the task; support seemed to be implicit and present, and scrutiny in its various guises tended to vary. Governing in areas of high socio-economic status was likely to be more challenging for a variety of reasons.

Governing processes

There was no discernible difference between the governing processes in high socio-economic disadvantage settings and low socio-economic disadvantage settings. This lack of difference may be because other factors, such as the capability of the ChGB, the quality of governing body organisation, the contribution of the headteacher and other teachers, may mask any difference.

Effects

There were a number of pressures against ensuring good governing in low socio-economic status settings (disadvantaged) settings but the relationship between governing quality and socio-economic context was not deterministic and will be moderated by a range of factors.

School governing and performance

In this part, we review the findings on school governing in high and low pupil attainment schools. We seek to distinguish governing in those different kinds of schools. The discussion is grouped under the headings: the context, the antecedents, the governing task, governing processes and the effects.

The context

The context for governing was likely to be more favourable in schools where pupil attainment was high than in those schools where attainment was low.

The antecedents

Governing bodies in both high and low performance settings required governors of high quality. It was not the case that schools in either setting felt they could relax in terms of what was needed for high quality governance, or that governance was not an important concern in high performance settings.

Having members of the governing body – teachers and/or lay governors – who have a specific interest in performance data, helped to elevate the level of scrutiny in relation to performance.

There was evidence that ‘good governing’, even in schools that are performing well, needed to be concerned with performance.

Schools that were performing well, and that had a local reputation for doing so, appeared to find it easier to attract governors with appropriate capabilities.

The governing task

Both high performing and low performing schools used a range of ways of describing the task; support seemed to be implicit and given freely and the various scrutiny processes tended to vary. In those schools with a focus on performance, scrutiny was evident and undertaken in an appropriate manner.

In those cases where governing had failed in the past, the evidence indicated that the governing body did not understand its task.

Most governing bodies had a broad sense of school performance but inevitably they were drawn towards test and attendance data.

Governing bodies – in high and low performance settings – did not see their task in relation to performance. In all the descriptors of the task, reference to performance was omitted. In practice however, they were clearly interested in the performance of the school.

Governing processes

In those cases where governing had failed in the past, the evidence indicated that the governing body processes – particularly scrutiny of performance data – were inadequate.

The general level of organisation, the leadership of the ChGB and the quality of the headteacher all played a part in enabling scrutiny of performance. Openness and trust were important qualities needed to scrutinise the performance of the school.

The provision of high quality and timely performance data was helpful in the performance scrutiny work of the governing body.

All the governing bodies had committees which had a responsibility for considering the performance of the school. Some governing bodies had a committee that specifically focused on school performance matters, an arrangement that seemed to work to good effect.

Allowing time for scrutiny of performance data in particular, and creating a climate where questions of any kind could be asked, helped governing processes.

The SIP report provided a useful opportunity to scrutinise the performance of the school.

There was evidence of governing bodies in the past removing headteachers of poorly performing schools and replacing them. They may also have had a key role in helping the school to progress following the replacement of the previous headteacher. Bringing about the resignation and replacement of a headteacher usually followed a crisis of some kind, which might be an Ofsted inspection or the appointment of a new ChGB.

Effects

From the case study data, it was clear that school governing bodies could have a substantial effect on the performance of the school. However, a number of factors, for example having a low level of capability, not understanding the task, having inadequate processes, could prevent them having that effect.

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we consider some of the substantive issues arising from the analysis of the survey data and the case studies. The issues include the dynamic nature of governing, the context for governing, the task and the model of governing, and the collective nature of governing. We then introduce two new concepts: governance capital and governance agency. These ideas assist the interpretation of the findings in relation to the governing of primary and secondary schools, governing and the socio-economic status of the school, and governing in relation to school performance. In the final section, we consider other matters of significance.

5.2 Substantive issues

5.2.1 The dynamic nature of school governing

During the data collection, we heard numerous stories of quite dramatic changes to the governance of the case study schools. Indeed, some of those we studied were in the midst of changes and/or anticipating further changes in the future.

A number of the schools were chosen on the basis of relatively low governing body performance as judged on the basis of self-reporting in the survey and Ofsted inspection evidence. We found that many of them had undergone significant changes either since the inspection or since the survey data was collected. The instigation of the change to the school's governance was often a crisis of some kind, such as the resignation of the headteacher or a poor inspection outcome, which in some instances had resulted in the resignation of the headteacher and/or the ChGB. Those changes were often to the organisation of the governing body, perhaps with the election of a new ChGB, often to the leadership of the school and on occasions, both. Governing can change substantially in the natural course of events with sudden and unexpected incidents, and of course, the continual turnover of membership of the governing body as governors' terms of office come to an end. The key point here is that 'governing' is always in a state of flux.

The setting of a school and the context for its governance can also change, occasionally quite rapidly. A variety of changes, such as variations in pupil numbers, a change of status, or changes in the nature of the community the school serves, were affecting many of the schools. These changes had significant implications for the schools and for the work of their governing

body. Again, the key point is that the context for governing is subject to change and may change quite substantially and rapidly.

So, given that governing and the context for governing may change, two important aspects of governing are particularly significant. Collective governing of a high quality, which we discuss below, would appear to be important in helping to secure the overall governance of the institution. Second, reflective strategic scrutiny and planning is important in keeping the governance of a school secure and ensuring the school is on a consistent 'upwards trajectory' in terms of pupil attainment. We would argue that both these approaches to governing are important and necessary. A further implication is that understandings of governing would benefit from longitudinal studies that examined how all aspects of governing – the antecedents, the task, the process and the effects – all shift over time and in relation to the context.

5.2.2 The collective nature of school governing

A powerful and substantive matter to emerge from the data was the importance of viewing the governing of schools as a collective activity in which the headteachers, members of staff and lay members collaborate in the governance of the school. From this standpoint, the governing body should not be viewed simply as 'an external body' calling the leadership of the school, that is, the headteacher and senior staff, to account. The work of a good governing body is more sophisticated than that. The school leadership and the governing body are *"two sides of the same coin"* (ChGB P10) and the valuable coin is of course, good governance. Where the collective nature of governance is weak, that is, where there is a serious discrepancy between the authority of the headteacher and the ChGB/governing body, it is likely that the governance will be weak.

Sound working relationships appeared to be the key to collective governing. They were emphasised as being important in good governing in the schools we studied. However, such relationships will only have significant value if they are between players who have authority. So, for example, a headteacher who lacks capability and a ChGB who similarly lacks capability may add value to each other's capability. However, such a relationship is not likely to be as productive in a governing sense as a relationship between a headteacher and ChGB with a high level of capability. Part of the relationship's capability is enabling the other(s) to take up their role.

The most beneficial outcome of collective governance is the securing of the school as an institution. From the stories we heard during the data collection, we were struck by how fragile schools are as institutions. Significant events and incidents can impact on schools, even the best ones, which can potentially change them dramatically and need to be managed. We would argue that collective governance, where the school is appropriately 'held' by a group who have a significant interest in it, is the best way to secure schools as important institutions.

5.2.3 The task of governing

The focus of interest of the governing bodies appeared to be ‘the school’ in its totality. Governors in high quality governing bodies of successful schools rarely viewed the task of governing as focused on the headteacher or the school leadership. Thus, construing ‘governing’ as ‘calling the headteacher to account’ and ‘challenging the headteacher’ is at odds with notions of how governing was construed in many of the schools we studied. Viewing governing in this way is all the more problematic because headteachers and other members of the school staff are members of school governing bodies. The task that was evident in many of the governing bodies we witnessed, especially those that were deemed to be effective, was ‘scrutiny’ – checking, asking questions, making sure the right decisions were being made, querying data, ensuring due processes had been followed, and so on. This scrutiny applied to strategic matters of course, but to significant operational matters too. Where governing was weak, or was reported as having been weak in the past, lack of scrutiny was at the heart of the weakness. Scrutiny of performance data is essential and the effective governing bodies we looked at were adept at performance data scrutiny.

Interestingly, the effective governing bodies we witnessed in action were very much self-scrutinising – ‘Are we doing the right thing here?’ This notion of self-scrutiny is understandable given that headteachers and staff are members of governing bodies. Further, some of the work of a full governing body will be scrutinising the work of its own committees. In addition, some of the exchanges we witnessed in full governing body meetings referred back to, and corroborated, previous decisions. This self-scrutiny seemed to be part of ensuring the governing body was acting properly.

In all the schools we studied, it was axiomatic that governors supported the school and the headteacher, and any reservations about the school and what it was doing that were voiced – and we did hear some – were couched positively.

5.2.4 The notion of governance capital

In this section, we introduce the notion of ‘governance capital’. It is an important idea that, along with ‘governance agency’, can help to explain the complexities of governance in relation to whether a school is a primary or a secondary, and to a school’s socio-economic status and performance.

Governance capital is the network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governance of any particular school. In the points below we develop this idea.

1. There are of course sub-divisions in the group that comprises governance capital, for example parents, members of the local community, local authority representatives, staff and so on.

2. Members of the teaching and administrative staff of the school who have the appropriate capability and are willing to take an active role in school governing are an important element of governance capital.
3. Parents of pupils in the school who have the right kind of capability and motivation are an important part of the governance capital of a school.
4. Major institutions, such as churches, universities, hospitals and businesses, may be important sources of governance capital for a school, especially if those institutions have a particular interest in the school.
5. A core of long-standing, experienced and capable governors can add substantially to governance capital, as can the availability of potential members with experience of working in schools/education or working with data.
6. Governance capital needs to be built and drawn on continuously because of the turnover of governors resulting from their limited period of tenure.
7. If the school is successful in terms of the performance of the pupils, its governance capital is likely to increase.
8. Schools that are held in high esteem or viewed with affection are likely to have a higher level of governance capital than those that are not.
9. In settings with wide ethnic diversity or a high level of family mobility, governance capital may well be low. Moreover, developing it in those settings may be difficult.
10. The available governance capital can be developed through training and development. The governing bodies we studied undertook this development work in a range of ways. It was clear that those development activities that enhanced motivation were particularly significant. Enhancing motivation should arguably be central in all development activities.
11. The headteacher in particular, but other members of the governing body as well, especially the ChGB, have a significant role in building and developing governance capital. This governance capital development will encompass training and development, nurturing parents who may have the potential to be good governors but initially lack the motivation, and seeking members of the local community who may have the necessary qualities. These activities are part of governance agency, a notion we develop below. In seeking out members of the community, the necessity to have governing capability, the ability to form relationships and to be part of a network of like-minded others and to have an appropriate motivation mean that members of 'professions', including those in management positions in businesses, are likely to be recruited.
12. Where the governance capital is low, coping with a change of headteacher, ChGB, governing body membership, and/or context is likely to be harder than if governance capital is high.
13. Governance capital creates an amplification effect. The capability of the governing body to contribute to the work of the school and to ensure its continued improvement is amplified, as the following model shows.

- *High quality of existing governing body* – it has already drawn on available governing capital – plus:
- *The school is successful, and is held in high esteem and/or viewed with affection* – it is likely to have a higher level of governance capital available – plus:
- *The school's context has high socio-economic status* – it is likely to have an even higher level of governance capital available.

The amplifier effect may turn the other way if the following conditions prevail.

- *Low quality of existing governing body* – it has not been able to draw upon the governance capital available to it – minus:
- *The school is not considered to be successful or held in high regard by the community* – potential governors will be less willing to come forward, governance capital is reduced – minus:
- *The school is in an area of low socio-economic status* – governance capital is reduced even further.

14. The notion of governance capital is useful in understanding the resources that are available to schools for governance and the nature of that resource, the extent of it, its engagement and its development. It provides a useful heuristic for considering the kind of people who are available to a school for governing, their capabilities and their engagement with training and development. The headteacher, the ChGB and the clerk are important elements of the governance capital of any one school. They each contribute to the governance capital in different ways of course, but from this study, the work of the ChGB appears to be of particular significance.

5.2.5 Agency for governance

The level of agency – proactivity, exertion, effort, and endeavour – of those involved in governing was a significant theme in the data. Agency for governance can mask any effects of the performance of the school and the socio-economic context on governing. It influences the building of governance capital, recruitment, the level of organisation of the governing body and participation in governing. Creativity in developing governing capital, for example through the use of additional governors, is an important aspect of the agency for governance.

ChGBs, headteachers and clerks are central figures and significant in terms of the agency they bring to governing. Their endeavours may well mutually enhance and support. The importance of the agency for governance from the ChGB makes the role a key school and community leadership responsibility. However, there is a good case for arguing that the headteacher should be the default source of agency for governance if it is not available from any other source.

5.2.6 Modelling school governing

In this section, we attempt to make sense of school governing in terms of understandings of governance in other settings. We make use of the 'stewardship' and 'principal-agent' models in the main to explore the nature of school governing and, in particular, the dynamics of school governing.

In a general sense, the governing bodies we observed were of the stewardship model but some had not always worked in that way.

Drawing on the explanation of the stewardship model in Chapter 2, an ideal stewardship model for school governing would have the following features, many of which were evident in the case studies. We have used the term 'lay governors' to distinguish the members of the governing body from the headteacher principally but also from other members of staff who were governing body members.

1. The headteacher would want to run the organisation effectively and would be considered to be:
 - ready to act in the common good
 - co-operative
 - motivated to act wholeheartedly to meet the organisation's objectives.
2. The lay governors would hold similar views and the interests of the headteacher and the governing body were thus naturally aligned.
3. The headteacher's knowledge about the school would not be substantively superior to that of the lay governors because of the openness with which information was shared, although it may well be more detailed.
4. The lay governors would be provided with high quality performance data of a range of kinds. The lay governors would know the school.
5. The lay governors would be capable and willing to scrutinise any information about the school and its performance, relevant policies, plans and important decisions. This scrutiny would be helped if there were experts amongst the lay governors – perhaps from the world of schools and education, or if there were lay members who were able to make sense of and scrutinise the school's performance data.
6. Headteachers would be open with information and it would be assumed that they would use the information for the benefit of the school. However, that would be of little consequence in practice. It would be assumed they would use this knowledge to the benefit of the school.
7. The lay membership would comprise representatives of the institution's main stakeholder groups. They would see their task as empowering the headteacher and her/his senior leadership colleagues and collaborating with them.

The governing body may take up a role that conforms to the principal-agent model. Although we did not observe this model in practice, there were examples where it had been undertaken in that way in the past. School governing that conformed to the principal-agent model in an ideal form would have the following characteristics.

1. The governing body would consider that the headteacher did not want to run the organisation effectively and would not be considered to be:
 - ready to act in the common good
 - co-operative
 - motivated to act wholeheartedly to meet the organisation's objectives.

The interests of headteachers and the lay members are thus not naturally aligned.

2. The headteacher's knowledge about the school would be substantively superior to that of the lay members.
3. The lay members would not be provided with high quality performance data.
4. The 'headteacher in the mind' of the lay members is one who is likely to act in his/her own best interests should circumstances permit and may not be naturally motivated to act – or capable naturally of acting – in the school's best interests.
5. The lay members would need to undertake a monitoring role.
6. The lay members would feel compelled to take strong action and perhaps remove the headteacher from his/her post if the school was not being run effectively or, for example, an Ofsted inspection had an unsatisfactory outcome.

There were examples in the data where school governing in the past had moved from the stewardship model to the principal-agent model in order to respond to under-performance of some kind in the school. In many instances but by no means all, the move to principal-agent model was instigated by an Ofsted inspection. There were occasions where the lay members of the governing body forced the resignation of the headteacher because the school was not functioning properly.

There may be instances where the lay members of the governing body lack the capability and/or motivation to undertake governing in either the stewardship or principal-agent modes. In these instances, if the headteacher is capable, he/she may initiate a change in the governing body to improve it, something we heard on numerous occasions. The lack of capable lay members of the governing body to enact the stewardship model is not just a neutral absence. It is a substantial disadvantage, as we heard in cases where there was this lack of capability. This low level of capability together perhaps with a lack of alignment between the headteacher's ambitions for the school could be a veritable drag on the school's progress. The expertise is lacking which the school needs, and when the headteacher moves on the school may lack the governance capability to continue performing adequately.

If headteachers lack capability, need to control the governing body, or resent working with capable lay members, they may well be happy with weak lay members. In

the long term, though, such an arrangement of a headteacher with any of these orientations and a weak lay membership is not likely to be sustainable. The school is likely to cease to function as it should.

5.2.7 Governing in primary schools, secondary schools, socio-economic status and performance

In the sections that follow, we discuss the outcomes of the project that relate to governing in primary schools, secondary schools, and the socio-economic status and performance of those schools.

Governing in primary and secondary schools

One of the more interesting findings from the multi-level analysis of the survey data was that the effectiveness of primary school governing bodies is positively and relatively strongly linked with pupil attainment. On the other hand, the effectiveness of secondary schools' governing bodies is only very weakly linked to pupil attainment. For a variety of reasons, which we discuss below, this finding is perhaps to be expected. Just to say at this point, it would be erroneous to conclude from this finding that primary school governing bodies matter for pupil attainment, and secondary school governing bodies do not. Identifying causal effects is notoriously difficult in organisations, especially large and complex ones like secondary schools. Moreover, identifying links between two very complex matters like pupil attainment and school governance in large schools is extremely difficult. So there is a case to be argued that secondary school governing bodies do have an effect but it is just very difficult to find with even the very sophisticated methods we have used in this study. However, the finding 'does not say nothing', and perhaps there are lessons to be learned about how school governance could be constructed and undertaken in secondary schools that could be informed by practice in primary schools.

Our sense of the difference between the governing of primary schools and that of secondary schools was that the governing of primary schools was for a whole set of reasons 'a more intimate affair'.

- Parents' relationships with their children and therefore with the schools is different in primary and secondary school settings.
- The scale of the operation is smaller in primary schools and the task of governing therefore not so daunting. Secondary schools are much larger concerns catering for young adults as opposed to young children.
- The task of governing entails a closer set of relationships in primary schools. Parents frequently come to the school and may have to enter it to collect their children; they are more likely to live locally; and their child's teacher becomes a significant other in the child's (and parent's) life because pupils in primary schools typically have one main teacher. All these factors are typically in contrast with relationships in secondary schools.

- The practices of the primary schools as organisations are much closer to the practices of parents, so they may feel more ready to be part of it. Much of the work of secondary schools is different from typical home activities.
- There was a sense that governors of primary schools had a more intimate, fond and affectionate relationship with their schools than those in secondary schools especially when those schools were successful in disadvantaged settings. The attachment of governors in secondary schools may relate more to the status and esteem of the institution.

For a variety of reasons, the governors of primary schools we studied were 'governing' as in secondary schools but were 'closer to the action'. They were concerned with single classes rather than departments. The performance of a particular teacher may be a concern for the governing body in the way that it appeared not to be for a secondary school governing body. The size and scale of the operation in primary schools perhaps gave them more scope to lever change and to enable improvement; generally primary school governors were 'in-school' more than secondary school governors. Importantly, these factors may explain the finding from the quantitative analysis that governing body effectiveness is more closely correlated with pupil attainment in primary schools than in secondary schools.

It is likely that the governance capital available to primary schools is different from that available to secondary schools. It is likely to be smaller. However the extent and availability of governance capital is likely to be mediated by a range of other factors.

School governing and socio-economic status

The relationship between governing and socio-economic status is complex. It was an interesting finding from the quantitative analysis that the governing body effect on pupil attainment is not moderated by socio-economic disadvantage. That is, governing bodies exert a broadly similar effect in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings. One interpretation is that a characteristic of effective governing bodies is that they proactively seek out good governors and that they do this regardless of setting. Good governing bodies have a high level of governance agency, which may offset any reduction in the governance capital they have available as a result of the socio-economic context. A variety of other factors may mediate the socio-economic status effect. These factors include the success of the school (there was evidence that governors like to be part of a success story), and that schools in disadvantaged settings, especially perhaps primary schools, may be seen as needing charitable assistance and therefore attract governors. Some schools in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings may be supported by other major institutions such as churches that may be a source of governance capital. This support may offset any negative socio-economic effect on governing.

School governing and performance

The schools we studied interacted with pupil performance through their scrutiny of pupil performance data and the way the notion of pupil performance was construed. Governing bodies scrutinised data in a range of ways and to varying extents. This

variation may be linked to phase, to the particular meetings we observed, or to the sequence in the 'performance cycle'. An important part of this scrutiny process was the open provision of data in an accessible form. Both factors are important therefore: the capability to scrutinise and the provision of information.

The school's performance was also significant in governor recruitment. There was evidence that high performing schools attract governors, especially those with professional occupations. Such governors may be expected to have a strong 'starting capability' for governing. There was some evidence that attracting governors to schools that were not performing well was more difficult. This matter may well play into the relationship between effective governance and pupil performance.

It is likely that schools that are performing well have more governance capital available to them than those that are not. Further, the agency required to develop and exploit that capital may be required for attempts to improve the performance of the school.

5.2.8 Other significant issues

The capabilities of the members of the governing body

It was clear from the data that governors needed a range of skills and capabilities, and importantly, the ability to learn about the institution they were governing and the world of education of which the institution was a part. Moreover, governors came with a range of views, perspectives, approaches and motivations. There needs to be a balance in all of those characteristics. A key capability that emerged from the data is the readiness to ask questions. Asking questions enhances understanding and enables scrutiny. Further, all governors need to accept that questions will be asked. Indeed, all governors may be asked questions – if they are members of the school management team or members of governing body committees. In that sense, governing becomes a process of self-scrutiny and a key question is: 'Are we doing the right thing?'

The public profile of governing

The amount of easily available information about a school's governing body, for example through their school's website, does not typically match the responsibility that the school governing body has for the conduct of the school. This lack of available information sustains the hidden nature of school governing.

The appointment of a new headteacher

One of the most important tasks a governing body can undertake is the appointment of a new headteacher, and it is an extremely important moment in the life of a school. For many governors appointing a headteacher is not a frequent event and many governors may never experience appointing a new headteacher. There is an argument for changing procedures to ensure that the processes for appointing a new headteacher are secure.

Relationships with local authorities

The role of the local authority governor is unclear and in some ways can be unsatisfactory. In some instances, the local authority governor will be an existing member of the governing body whose term, for example as a parent governor, has ended. The local authority governor may be a local councillor. Regardless, there was very little evidence of the responsibility or the link with the authority being used in any productive way. For example, there was no evidence of briefing meetings for all authority governors in a local authority, or specific communications with these governors by the local authority. When the local authority governor was a local councillor, the experience of governing bodies was patchy. There was evidence of some councillors making a significant positive contribution; some attending very irregularly; and some wishing to join the governing bodies of successful schools to advance their political standing.

In some of the governing bodies we studied, the local authority was not always positively viewed. One interpretation is that the local authority provides a very useful 'external enemy' on which governing bodies can vent their frustrations. Thus, local authorities are often seen as demanding or unhelpful or not wanting to act in the school's interest. There may be a case for local authorities creating more positive relationships with governing bodies.

The importance of the core group, the work of committees and informal 'meetings'

It was clear that many governing bodies relied on a core group of experienced and expert governors. Often they would also act as chairs of committees, which is where a substantial amount of important governing body work took place. They would be in contact informally with other governors about governing matters. The meetings, especially those of full governing bodies, were often then simply the outcome of that 'informal' governing work and interaction. Being a member of a committee was a significant part of being a governor.

The importance of these governing processes and the way they were used may help to explain why there was often a lack of serious dissent at the meetings. Meetings were typically highly consensual. Significant matters had been talked through and agreed upon before the full governing body meeting. There was evidence that where this pre-meeting discussion had not taken place there could be difficult and protracted discussions at the full governing body meeting.

The role of link governors

Link governors were variously used by the governing bodies we studied. Some of the more powerful link governor processes were when the link related to specific development objectives, for example at department level in secondary schools or curriculum areas in primaries. A link with a department or curriculum area without the development/improvement focus tended to lack 'energy' and was not so successful.

The role of the chair of the governing body

The ChGB role was pivotal in five areas:

1. Working with the headteacher – ideally in partnership
2. Having a presence in the school as the chair of the body responsible for the school's conduct
3. Organising the governing body
4. Chairing the meetings of the full governing body
5. Being a governor.

Chairing meetings is important. They often need to be shrewdly chaired and it is where other aspects of the role are manifested. However, arguably it is the least important of the roles.

We consider that the role of ChGB in the education system is substantially underplayed and given insufficient status. It is a significant educational and community leadership role.

The nature of school governing

The task of governing a school is never easy even when things are going well. Indeed, in a whole range of ways, it is always very demanding. There was considerable evidence of governors individually and collectively managing some very thorny issues.

Key players in making governing work are typically the ChGB, the headteacher and the clerk. From our observations, governing bodies that were well organised were typically the more effective governing bodies.

This report describes a research project that analysed the relationship between school governing and school performance and the way this relationship was contingent upon the school type and socio-economic setting. The project engaged in three main activities.

1. It analysed the literature relevant to school governing.
2. The project extended the analysis of data from a national survey of school governors undertaken by Balarin (2008) by relating notions of governing body effectiveness to pupil attainment through a multi-level analysis. It also contrasted aspects of governing practice in: primary and secondary school settings; schools with high and low levels of pupil attainment; and schools with high and low socio-economic status.
3. It undertook case studies of school governing in England in 16 primary schools and 14 secondary schools in a range of attainment and socio-economic status settings.

The main findings are as follows.

1. School governors give an enormous amount to the education system in England, yet their contribution is largely hidden from public view.
2. The lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence; it is a substantial disadvantage for a school.
3. The ChGB and the ChBG's relationship with the headteacher are very significant in enabling high quality governance. Being the chair of a school governing body is a significant educational and community leadership responsibility.
4. The role of the local authority governor is unclear and in some ways can be unsatisfactory. There was very little evidence of the responsibility or the link with the authority being used in a productive way.
5. Notions of 'challenging the headteacher' and 'calling the headteacher to account' did not match the practices of the governing bodies studied. The focus tended to be on scrutiny – of information, decisions, plans and policies. The governing task was only rarely described in terms of 'performance'; it was always talked about in terms of the 'school'. Further, support for the school was accepted as axiomatic.
6. School governing is important and can be difficult and demanding. It takes place in a range of ways and at various times, through informal contacts and meetings, formal meetings, in schools and during particular ad hoc events such as 'away days'.
7. Primary school governing and secondary school governing are different. The level of effectiveness of primary school governing is linked clearly and positively to the level of pupil attainment. The link between secondary school governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment is very weak.

8. The governing of a school and the context for governing are typically in a continual state of flux.
9. Well managed governing as a collective activity based on the stakeholder model is well placed to cope with the changeable nature of both governance and the context for governance.
10. Governing bodies exert a similar effect on pupil attainment in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings.
11. The extent to which the governing body focused on the performance of the school and how performance was considered varied under a range of influences.
12. Governance capital is the network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governing of any particular school. The governance capital available is likely to be greater for schools that: are well regarded compared with those that are not; are in higher socio-economic status settings; and have higher levels of pupil attainment. These effects may add and mutually reinforce the creation of an 'amplifier effect' which may seriously impact on the governing of some schools.
13. Governance agency is the energy, level of proactivity, drive and commitment to the governing, and for the governing, of any particular school. It is highly significant for all aspects of governing and can ameliorate the effects of low governance capital. The effect of governance agency complicates the relationship between governing, performance and socio-economic context.

We were struck by a number of the outcomes generally. The most significant was our sense of the relatively fragile nature of schools as institutions. Although schools may seem stable and secure, they are in fact potentially subject to a whole range of influences in both the short term and over the long term that can significantly affect them and their work. Effective school governing can help to secure schools as institutions against these threats so that the staff can undertake their work properly and the pupils can learn and thrive.

As with any substantial research project such as this one, the outcomes point to other significant matters for further research. These include:

- studies of the various types of governor and their contribution
- an analysis of the role of the ChGB
- the development of the notions of governance capital and governance agency
- gaining understandings of the ways in which governing bodies cope with significant organisational events and disruptions
- longitudinal studies of school governing which have the potential to be extremely illuminating.

School governing has never been a substantive focus for researchers in educational leadership and management and it is time that it was subject to in-depth study.

The findings of the research confirmed that school governing is complicated, demanding, and goes on largely unnoticed. The commitment of many of those we interviewed was quite remarkable especially in terms of the time they gave to their governing responsibilities. Much of the work of lay governors is hidden from view and is all undertaken for no tangible reward. The 300,000 or so school governors in England make a significant contribution to their schools and to the education system as a whole.

The members of the research team would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to all the respondents in the study who gave their time freely and offered their considerable insights very generously and to CfBT Education Trust for funding the research.

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A1.1 Introduction

This appendix explains the quantitative analyses undertaken by the project. There were two main strands to this part of the project's work.

1. The multi-level analysis which sought to establish the relationship between governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment in primary schools and secondary schools in high and low socio-economic settings.
2. The analysis of the survey data of Balarin et al. (2008) in relation to primary and secondary schools, the socio-economic status of the schools and high and low levels of pupil attainment.

A1.2 The multi-level analysis

A1.2.1 Introduction

The factors that are associated with the educational attainment of pupils have been the subject of a large and varied body of conceptual and empirical research that has sought to shed light on the circumstances under which pupils exhibit strong academic achievement.

The need for more research into the determination of educational outcomes, particularly student and school outcomes, has been stressed by the OECD in its annual publication of indicators of educational systems.

Prior research concerned with educational attainment has highlighted a wide variety of influences on pupil attainment, including:

- attributes of pupils themselves – for example, age, gender and ethnicity
- their families such as parental occupation and incomes
- the schools they attend and the schools' size, leadership, resourcing, curricula, teaching quality, and phase
- the wider environments in which they live and learn, which includes factors such as population density, urbanity, and socio-economic status.

Within this research, a significant strand has focused on the importance of school leadership for educational attainment where "good" or "effective" leadership is almost universally recognised as an important driver of positive educational outcomes.

Perhaps paradoxically, the prevalence of research concerned with leadership has not yet been matched with a corresponding focus on the role that governors and governance play in shaping educational outcomes.

A1.2.2 Influences on pupil attainment

There is widespread recognition that the influences on the educational attainment of individual pupils are many, complex, and interdependent. Research has identified a number, ranging between three and as many as seven, of different 'levels' that collectively comprise the influences on pupil attainment. Typically, these levels include influences that relate to:

- ***The individual pupil.*** These are generally accepted as being among the most important influences on pupil attainment. They include: prior educational attainment; gender, ethnicity, health, age relative to cohort; and attitudinal features such as interest in school activities.
- ***The characteristics of the school.*** These factors include: the quality and quantity of resources available to schools; features such as the pupil/teacher ratio; the quality of teaching; and the quality of library, laboratory and computing facilities; teachers' working conditions, and their effects on teachers' internal states; and leadership and organisation.
- ***The influences relating to the wider environment within which the school is located.*** These factors include: the level of social and economic advantage and disadvantage of the context; and the characteristics of the locality where the pupils live and the school is located.

A1.2.3 Methods

Sampling

Our objective was to analyse, quantitatively, the potential influences of school governance on the educational attainment of pupils in primary and secondary schools in England. We focused on pupil attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4 as reflecting educational outcomes of the primary and secondary phase respectively.

The first stage of our sample definition began with the population of pupils taking Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 4 (KS4) assessments in 2008. We obtained data from the National Pupil Database (NPD). The NPD is a longitudinal database for all children in maintained schools in England. It is maintained by the Department for Education (DfE). The NPD links pupil/student characteristics to school and college learning aims and attainment. In 2008, the population of pupils in state maintained mainstream primary schools in England who completed national end-of-KS2 tests numbered 553,055 pupils in 16,142 schools. Similarly, the population of pupils completing KS4 (GCSE or equivalent) tests numbered 673,684 in 5,626 schools. We matched data on pupil attainment and characteristics to school level characteristics

using the DfE's KS2 and KS4 Primary and Secondary School Achievement and Attainment tables, data from EduBase, and data from Ofsted Section 5 school level inspection judgements.

Additionally, we drew upon data from a prior research project, the School Governance Study, undertaken in 2008 (Balarin et al., 2008), which surveyed school governors regarding a number of features of their governing bodies. Survey respondents numbered in excess of 5,000 from over 1,000 identifiable schools. When we matched these schools with the pupil and school level data necessary for our analysis, our final sample consisted of 545 primary schools and 169 secondary schools. These schools and pupils constitute our effective sample.

A1.2.4 Analytical approach

Consistent with most prior research concerned with educational attainment, we employ a hierarchical linear modelling approach. It reflects the multiple levels of analysis present in the analysis of the influences upon pupil attainment (Goldstein, 1995). Multi-level models recognise the hierarchical nature of the data used. Individual school pupils are grouped by school attended. This process enables an examination of the relationship between the response variable, for example educational attainment, and explanatory variables which takes account of other variables and allows variation at the individual and school levels.

Measuring pupil attainment

Contextual Value Added (CVA) is a method of measuring the progress made by pupils between different Key Stages. Progress is reported between KS1 and KS2 for primary schools and between KS2 and KS4 for secondary schools. CVA not only compares attainment achieved at KS2 and KS4, but also takes into account other factors outside a school's control but known to affect pupils' performance, such as gender, special educational needs, movement between schools and family circumstances. This means that CVA gives a much fairer statistical measure of the effectiveness of a school and provides a solid basis for comparisons.

Each pupil's CVA score is based on a comparison between their actual performance at KS2 compared to their predicted performance by the CVA model. An average of all pupils' scores is produced for a school, which is then adjusted for the model to take account of the cohort size (the 'shrinkage factor'). This then produces a school level CVA measure. This number is presented as a number based around 100 for primaries and 1000 for secondaries to indicate the average value that a school has added for its pupils.

Measuring school governance

Our previous study of school governance, the main findings of which are described in the report of the School Governing Study (Balarin et al., 2008), sought to examine numerous features of school governing from relatively structural elements such as the ease with which governors could be recruited to governing bodies, their size, and composition, to more process-oriented insights concerned with how governing

bodies functioned and how the task of governing was constructed. Where multiple governors participated in the school governing body, we averaged the data at the school level to provide a school-level indicator. Using data obtained in the school governing study we created the following variables for inclusion in our analysis:

- an overall measure of how effective members of a school's governing body perceive their governing body to be
- a measure of how easy governors perceived it to be to recruit and retain high-quality governors with skills appropriate to the role
- a measure of perceptions regarding the availability of, quality of, and participation in governor training
- a measure of the extent to which a school's governors perceived that they scrutinised, monitored and challenged the headteacher in relation to the school's strategies and decisions
- a measure of the engagement of a governing body in discussions and reflection concerned with the effectiveness of its activities.

Measuring socio-economic status

Appropriately accurate and reliable measures of socio-economic status (SES) are not easy to establish. Since 1992, Ofsted has used the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) as a surrogate measure of social disadvantage to contextualise school intake for the purposes of inspection (Ofsted, 1993). The information is readily available, has the advantage of being easy to measure and has a high correlation with pupil performance, but we are aware that there is evidence that its effects vary across schools.

Control variables

Pupil attainment is likely to be influenced by a range of individual and school-level phenomena, which we included in our multi-level modelling. Regarding pupil-level variables, we included the following.

- Gender: Boys (0) were contrasted with girls (1).
- Age: Calculated in completed months at the start of the week in which the age KS2 or KS4 tests were completed.
- Ethnicity: White British (0) were contrasted with other ethnicities, mixed, Asian Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, Asian other, Black, Chinese, not known (1).
- English spoken at home: Yes (0), No, not known (1).
- Special educational needs: None (0), school action or school action plus, statement of SEN or being assessed (1).
- Mobility: Pupils who spent the previous three years in the same school where they took their KS2 or KS4 tests were contrasted with those who had entered their schools during the key stage (from January of Year 3 onwards). Pupils moving from Infant to Junior schools at the start of Year 3, and the small proportion of pupils moving from first to middle schools, were not defined as mobile since typically in these cases the whole cohort transfers en masse.

Regarding school-level variables, we included the following.

- School size: Measured by a school's pupil roll.
- School capacity utilisation: Pupil roll relative to capacity.
- Religious denomination: Non-denominational versus C of E, RC, Jewish, other.
- School urban/rural indicator.

In addition, we included two other school-level variables in our initial analysis.

- Admissions policy. Selective versus non-selective intake.
- Mixed or boys or girls only.

However, since very high percentages of our sample were co-educational and non-selective, the introduction of these variables introduced multi-colinearity that made estimation of the model impossible. Therefore, they were removed from the subsequent analysis.

A1.2.5 Findings

In this section, we report the results of estimating multi-level models of school governing and the influence of socio-economic status.

School governing and pupil attainment

The first stage of our analysis used a baseline model for primary and secondary schools that takes the most recent Ofsted assessment of the extent to which governing and other supervisory bodies carry out their responsibilities effectively as the main indicator of the quality of school governance.

The findings suggest that both pupil and school-level variables influence pupil attainment. At the individual level, gender, mobility, and having special educational needs were all found to be associated with poorer pupil attainment. At the school level, the quality of governance was found to be the main variable of interest. The results suggested that better governance is associated, on average, with significantly improved educational attainment in both primary and secondary settings.

However, since Ofsted assessments of governance consist of a single 4-point scale, they are relatively crude proxies for the underlying complexity that characterises school governing. Also Ofsted assessments of governance are, in all likelihood, not independent of assessors' holistic assessments of overall school performance, which are likely to be influenced by information about attainment. Therefore, in the next stage of our analysis, we introduce variables that capture distinct elements of school governance from an independent source – the School Governance Study (Balarin et al., 2008).

The findings suggest that governance is significantly associated with educational attainment in primary schools compared to secondary schools. However, where governors perceived their governing practice to be more effective, it was associated with significantly higher pupil attainment in primary schools. The effect was not so great in secondary schools, although in each case, the effect size is small.

The influence of socio-economic status

The final stage in our analysis explored whether the associations between governing and pupil attainment we report here are moderated by socio-economic status. We explored this by introducing an interaction effect between perceptions of overall governing effectiveness, and the proportion of pupils at a school that are eligible for free school meals.

The main finding of interest is that the statistical significance of the added interaction effect is, in each case, below accepted levels for hypothesis testing. This indicates that the associations between governing and pupil attainment are not moderated by socio-economic status.

A1 2.6 Discussion and conclusion

In this appendix, we have presented evidence regarding the relationships between governing and pupil attainment for around 700 primary and secondary schools in England.

Our main findings are that governing has a significant but modestly sized effect on pupil attainment in both primary and secondary schools. The effect is greater in primaries than in secondaries. For primary schools, our evidence shows that more effective governing is associated with improved pupil attainment particularly in primary schools. This finding indicates that the nature of governing in primary schools and the organisational features of primary schools mean that governing is able to exert an influence on pupil attainment in a way that is more difficult to achieve in secondary schools.

Very interestingly, the analysis indicates that the associations between governing and pupil attainment are not moderated by socio-economic status. Again, this finding points to the complexity of the context of governing and there is considerable variation in the socio-economic contexts of schools and the way in which those contexts are interacted with by the school.

In interpreting our findings, some features of the analysis need to be borne in mind. The statistical modelling examines a contemporaneous, cross-sectional, relationship between the practice of governing and pupil attainment. This approach does not fully capture possible dynamic mechanisms by which pupil attainment and governing are related, a theme we return to in our discussion of the case study evidence.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in some ways, the quantitative data thus far does not reveal a single aspect of governing that significantly enhances its capacity to influence and significantly enhance pupil attainment and the value that a school adds to pupils' capabilities as they progress through the school.

A1.3

The analysis of the survey data of Balarin et al. (2008)

A1.3.1 Introduction

The second strand of the quantitative research used data from a previous research project, the School Governance Study (Balarin et al., 2008). The study surveyed school governors regarding a number of features of their governing bodies. The analysis sought to compare the responses in schools with high and low levels of attainment; high and low levels of socio-economic status; and primary and secondary schools.

A1.3.2 The sample

There were over 5,000 replies from over 1,000 identifiable schools. We matched these schools with the pupil and school level data necessary for our analysis. The final sample consisted of 545 primary schools and 169 secondary schools. These schools and pupils constitute our effective sample.

A1.3.3 The questionnaire

The questionnaire sought the level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Recruitment induction and training

1. It is generally very easy for us to find suitable people for our governing body
2. We have a structured induction process for new governors
3. Most of our governing body participated in training activities in the last year
4. We find identifying the willing governors with the right skills very challenging
5. We have a high degree of turnover among our governing body
6. A formal document describing the role and responsibilities of governors is provided to all new governors
7. When a new member joins the governing body an existing member is appointed to help them learn the ropes
8. All new members of the governing body are required to participate in a structured induction process
9. We have a service level agreement with our local authority for governor training
10. The quality of our governor training is excellent
11. Members of our governing body participate in local authority governor training programmes.

Attributes sought in governors

1. Ability to represent the interests of particular community groups
2. Specialist expertise
3. Well respected within the business community
4. Recommendations from members of the governing body
5. Standing in the community
6. Recognised strategic capabilities e.g. planning, performance or evaluation
7. Skills relevant to your school
8. Functional capabilities e.g. financial, legal or marketing
9. Recommendation from the headteacher
10. Ability to support the school ethos

Functioning of the governing body

1. Overall our school governing body works very effectively
2. The governing body has a clear understanding of its role and responsibilities
3. Governors from different categories work well side by side
4. Attendance at the meetings of the governing body is usually very good
5. The governing body and I share a common vision of what the school is trying to achieve
6. Communication between myself and the governing body is good
7. Members of the governing body have a clearly structured agenda
8. Meetings of the governing body often run on too long
9. The chair of the governing body plays a very effective role
10. Members of the governing body feel able to speak their minds on issues
11. Our governing body has formal Terms of Reference
12. The clerk offers specialist advice and guidance
13. The organisation of our governing body's business is greatly facilitated by our clerk
14. Balancing their role as a member of our governing body with other responsibilities is challenging for our governors
15. The clerk to the governing body also works in the school in a different capacity
16. The main job of the clerk is to take the minutes of the meetings
17. The governing body has participated in discussions about the effectiveness of its performance
18. Members of the governing body are supplied with good quality, relevant information

The task of governing

1. Long- and medium-term strategic planning
2. Supporting the headteacher
3. Challenging the headteacher
4. Financial management

5. Monitoring plans and targets
6. The scrutiny role
7. Source of information about business, industry and careers
8. Carrying out operational tasks
9. Ensuring the accountability of the governing body
10. Representing community and parental interests
11. Collaboration with other community institutions, including schools

A1.3.4 References

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Appendix 2

The case study research methods

A2.1 Introduction

This appendix explains the case study research methods. A total of 30 schools were studied as individual cases.

A1.2 The research

A1.2.1 The sample

Altogether 16 primary and 14 secondary schools were studied which varied according to: high and low governing body effectiveness; high and low school performance; and high and low socio-economic status. These additional three analytical variables gave eight categories of school. In addition, further primary and secondary schools were identified which were 'at the extremes' of the variables that the study was interested in – governing quality, school performance and socio-economic context. All the schools studied and their characteristics are briefly described after the data collection and data analysis sections.

A1.2.2 The data collection

In each case, the ChGB, the headteacher and at least one other governor were interviewed and at least one governing body meeting was observed.

The interviews explored: aspects of the school; the school's recent history, especially in relation to governance; the antecedents of governing, such as recruitment, training and development and governor capability; the way in which the task of governing was viewed; governing processes; and any other matters relevant to the governing of that particular school.

Data collection involved a visit to the school to interview the headteacher and the ChGB and to observe a governing body meeting. There were then follow-up telephone interviews with members of the governing body and, in some instances, a further visit to undertake face-to-face interviews and/or to observe other meetings. Interviews were either recorded for later analysis or field notes were made during the interviews. During the meetings, field notes were taken that related mostly to the process but also recorded matters that related to antecedents for governing and the task.

The case study data collection was undertaken by a team of experienced researchers.

A1.2.3 The data analysis

When the data collection for a case was complete, each researcher wrote an account of the case, noting any matters of significance from the data that related to the research questions. The accounts and all the data collection notes and transcripts were then passed to the project co-directors who scrutinised the set and noted particular issues of significance. The project co-directors then discussed the case at length with the researcher and further case notes were made. This process facilitated the development of emergent themes – the aspects of governing that were significant in this particular case. With these themes in mind, the data from each case study was analysed to develop the themes further and to identify additional ones. The account of these themes was then fed back to all the researchers: to check for accuracy; for validation; and for further enrichment.

A1.2.4 The schools studied

Details of the schools studied as individual cases are given below. In the detail provided, CVA stands for Contextual Value Added; IDACI for Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index; and %FSM is the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. Ofsted measures are inspection grades. Measures of governance quality from the Balarin et al. (2008) survey run from 3 (low) to 7 (high).

Primary Schools

P1

P1 was a mixed community primary school with approximately 220 pupils on roll aged between 4 and 11 years. The school, which opened in 2002, served a modern estate of private and social housing on the edge of a medium-sized town in a south of England county. The proportion of pupils with disabilities and/or learning difficulties was about the national average. A small percentage of pupils were from minority ethnic groups, or spoke a language other than English at home. The school had an excellent reputation for achieving high standards and was listed in the top 100 most improved in the country in 2006. Since then, the school had had a very successful Ofsted inspection and had gained a variety of awards. Among them was the Effective Early Learning Quality Assurance Award.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	271
CVA	102
Ofsted	1
Governance quality	
Ofsted	1
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.08
FSM%	8

P2

Located in an inner London borough, school P2 was a mixed junior school with approximately 240 pupils on roll. The school was above average in size and catered for pupils aged 7–11 years from a wide range of ethnic groups, the largest of which were those of White British, Black African and other White heritage. A higher than usual proportion of pupils learned English as an additional language and the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals was well above average. The proportion of pupils with disabilities and/or learning difficulties was higher than in most schools. A well above average percentage of pupils had a statement of special educational need. Pupils' learning needs related to moderate learning difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school had gained several national awards.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	283
CVA	101
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.48
FSM%	46

P3

School P3, which had approximately 345 pupils on roll, was a larger than average Voluntary Controlled school situated in a county in the south of England. The school catered for boys and girls aged 4–11, the majority of whom were of White British background. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was considerably higher than the national average and the number of pupils with a statement of educational needs was higher than the national average. There was a Specialist Learning Centre providing for learners with complex needs. The school provided out of school hours care for its pupils.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	205
CVA	101
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.15
FSM%	22

P4

P4 was a large 3–11 primary school (459 on roll) located in an ethnically and socially diverse area of north London. Over 50% of pupils were entitled to receive free school meals, which was higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was extremely high and over 75% of pupils were learning English as an additional language. About 18 languages were spoken, the most common being Bengali and Somali. The proportion of pupils who find learning difficult was about average and included pupils with moderate learning needs and speech and behavioural needs. The number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs was above the national average. A significant number of pupils joined or left the school at different times. The school held Investors in People and Healthy Schools awards.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	210
CVA	99
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.52
FSM%	53

P5

Situated in the East Midlands, this 7–11 community junior school had approximately 340 pupils on roll – above the average for similar schools. A distinctive feature of the school was the Enhanced Resource Facility (ERF) that catered for up to 22 children with statements of special educational needs. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals was above the national average, while the proportion of children from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of those whose first language was

believed not to be English, were below average. Children who joined the school in Year 3 had a range of abilities but overall standards were average. The school had achieved the Gold International Schools Award and the Healthy Schools award.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	221
CVA	99
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.30
FSM%	17

P6

Located in a county in the south of England, this 4–11 Church of England, Voluntary Controlled primary school was slightly smaller than average in size. Many of its 190 or so pupils were mainly White British and come from socially advantaged backgrounds which meant that few were therefore eligible for free school meals. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was well below average. In addition to gaining the Gold Artsmark Award, and National Healthy School status, the school had received two School Achievement Awards.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	300
CVA	101
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.05
FSM%	0

P7

P7 was an above-average sized primary school with 436 pupils aged 3–11 on roll and included Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision. The roll had risen significantly in recent years. Both the numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals were below average. Pupils from minority ethnic groups were fewer than average. The school was an Investor in People, had Healthy School status and held the Activemark award. The school was situated on the outskirts of a city in the south west of England.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	282
CVA	101
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.13
FSM%	11

P8

Slightly smaller than the average primary school, P8 served an area within a county in the south of England. Most of the 175 or so 4–11 year-old pupils were of White British heritage. A small number of pupils spoke English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was also currently in line with the national average.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	165
CVA	98
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.13
FSM%	10

P9

This smaller than average (159 on roll) community primary school had a reducing roll, but a few pupils moved in and out during the school year. It served an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage and a third of the pupils were entitled to free school meals. Almost all pupils were White British. A very small number of the school's 3-11 year-old pupils were in the care of the local authority. A broadly average proportion of pupils had learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school was recognised as providing a full range of extended services. The school had successfully achieved the following awards: Healthy Schools, Activemark, Artsmark, an Inclusion Charter Mark, Taking a Stand and Financial Management.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	204
CVA	100
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	3
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.48
FSM%	3

P10

With a pupil roll of 540, this mixed primary school situated in a borough to the north west of London, was large in comparison to other primary schools. Pupils came from a wide range of backgrounds including White British, Black and Asian. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was above average and those whose first language was believed to be other than English was nearly four times higher than found in other schools. The percentage of pupils claiming free school meals was above average and the proportion of pupils with specific difficulties such as emotional or social problems, including those with a statement of special educational needs, was also above average. The proportion of pupils arriving or leaving the school, at other than the expected times, was high. The school had attained the Healthy Schools Award.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	185
CVA	99
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.52
FSM%	40

P11

This large community primary school with just over 400 boys and girls on roll served an area experiencing rapid change. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds had grown significantly in recent years to a fifth of the school roll. There were pupils from 23 different countries, many having recently arrived in the UK. About 12% of pupils had English as an additional language, a few of whom were at a very early stage of acquiring English. As they started school, children's understanding and skills was below those typical of the age group, especially in early literacy and numeracy skills. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties was above average.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	248
CVA	100
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	1
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.14
FSM%	10

P12

P12 was a smaller than average 4–11 primary school located in a county in the south of England. Most of its 132 pupils were White British. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with statements of special educational needs was above average. Of these pupils, the majority had either profound and multiple learning difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. The school held the Sports Activemark. There was an independently run pre-school which shared the same site. When inspected in September 2007, this community school was judged to require special measures.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	185
CVA	99
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	4
Survey data	3
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.20
FSM%	17

P13

Situated in the West Midlands, this 3–11 community primary was larger than average, with approximately 390 on roll. Nearly three quarters of the pupils came from a White British background. The remainder came from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds, with Indian being the next largest group. About 10% of the pupils spoke English as an additional language but very few were at an early stage of learning English. A popular and oversubscribed school, it was the recipient of an Artsmark Gold award and a Healthy Schools award, as well as being an Investor in People.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	300
CVA	103
Ofsted	1
Governance quality	
Ofsted	1
Survey data	N/A
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.28
FSM%	12

P14

P14 was a mixed 4–11 community primary school serving an inner city area of a large city in the West Midlands where considerable housing re-development was under way. The 167 pupils currently on roll came from many different ethnic backgrounds and the percentage whose first language was not English was well above average. Many pupils joined the school part way through their education, or arrived from other countries where they had had little or no formal education and were unable to speak English.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	190
CVA	90
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	N/A
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.47
FSM%	64

P15

A Catholic, Voluntary Aided school, P15 had approximately 130 children on roll and was therefore a smaller-than-average primary school. It served an area of a town to the west of London with a high level of socio-economic deprivation. The percentage of the pupils with learning difficulties and of those with statements of special educational needs was very high. The proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language was above average. Although the attainment of pupils when they entered the school varied from group to group, it was generally very low.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	N/A
CVA	99
Ofsted	N/A
Governance quality	
Ofsted	N/A
Survey data	N/A
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	N/A
FSM%	N/A

P16

School P16 was located in a unitary authority 30 miles west of London. With 314 boys and girls on roll, this 4–11 community school was larger than most primary schools. Almost all pupils had White British heritage and very few were at an early stage of learning to speak English. Ten pupils came from traveller families. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was below average. The most common needs of these pupils stemmed from difficulties in developing basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Registered childcare was provided on the school site, which was run by a separate organisation, and there was after-school care.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	267
CVA	101
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.02
FSM%	2

Secondary Schools

S1

This 11–19 grammar school for just over 1000 girls was a larger than average selective school with a sixth form of over 250. Students came to the school from around 40 primary schools in the area. Students were predominantly of White British heritage and there were very few for whom English was not their first language. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals was low and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was also low. The school was a specialist college for languages and for humanities. It had been recognised as a Gold Sportsmark School and had gained the Healthy Schools and Inclusion awards, the International Schools Award and Sport England Schools Award.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	509
CVA	1011
Ofsted	1
Governance quality	
Ofsted	1
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.08
FSM%	3

S2

This mixed 11–16 secondary school had just over 800 students on roll and was over-subscribed. It was situated on the outskirts of a market town in the south west of England. Pupils come from more than 30 primary schools serving mainly the surrounding rural villages but also including some areas in which there was a relatively high level of social deprivation. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school was broadly average and the proportion known to be eligible for free school

meals was below the national average. The vast majority of pupils were from White British backgrounds and very few spoke English as an additional language. The school had Sports College status and additional specialisms in Science and Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning. In addition, the school had attained the permanent Eco School Award and had further awards including Healthy Schools, Investors in People, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Sportsmark.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	387
CVA	1007
Ofsted	1
Governance quality	
Ofsted	1
Survey data	3
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.09
FSM%	5

S3

S3 was a slightly larger than average 11-18 co-educational secondary modern school, which was federated with a neighbouring primary school under one governing body and one headteacher. The two schools formed part of the S3 campus and the federated schools became a Trust in April 2008. The school was a specialist sports college and was oversubscribed. Entry to the school was after county selection procedures, where approximately one third of students from local primary schools go elsewhere to selective schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was above average. The great majority of the 1150 pupils on roll were of White British heritage. The school had an integrated speech and language unit and there were significantly more pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than in other schools, many of whom had moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	500
CVA	1063
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	1
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.24
FSM%	17

S4

Located in a borough to the north west of London, S4 was a larger than average 11–19 mixed comprehensive school of approximately 1200 students. Over three quarters of the students were from minority ethnic groups, the largest groups being Asian or Asian British heritage and Black or Black British Caribbean heritage. Around 20% were from a range of White backgrounds. Although the proportion of students whose first language was not English was very high, only a few were at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, was much higher than in most schools. Most of the students in this group experienced behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, a few had moderate learning difficulties and several had dyslexia, had difficulties in speech and language, were autistic or had physical impairments. The proportion entitled to free school meals had increased slightly and was well above the national average. A substantial number of students entered and left during the school year and many of the late entrants had gaps in their formal schooling. Some of these students were refugees or asylum seekers. The school had achieved Business and Enterprise Specialist Status in 2003 and became a Creative Partnership core school in 2006. It had retained its Healthy Schools status, originally awarded in 2003.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	389
CVA	1010
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.41
FSM%	22

S5

S5 was situated in a borough to the north west of London. The majority of the 1150 or so, 11–18 students in this large foundation school came from the local area. The sixth form had approximately 240 students. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was below average. About a fifth of the pupils were from minority ethnic groups, mainly Indian, but only a few were at early stages of using the English language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities was lower than the national average, although the proportion with statements of special educational needs was higher. The school had had specialist Mathematics and Computing College status since 2003. The school had a small specialist unit for hearing impaired pupils from across the local authority area.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	460
CVA	990
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.10
FSM%	3

S6

With almost 700 students on roll, this school was smaller than the average secondary school. Situated in a county in the south east of England, roughly three-quarters of the students were of White British heritage, with the remaining students drawn from a diverse range of minority ethnic groups. About a fifth of the students spoke a language other than English at home, with an increasing proportion at an early stage of learning English as a second language. Free school meal eligibility was below the national average but was higher than the local authority's average. The number of students entering and leaving this 11–18 co-educational school other than at the normal time was above average, as was the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most of these students had specific learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social needs. The school had enjoyed Business and Enterprise status since 2004 and had several awards including Investors in People (2007), the International School Award (2008) and Investor in Careers (2008).

Educational attainment	
Raw score	444
CVA	978
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.13
FSM%	10

S7

This 11–18 school was a large, mixed foundation school situated in a borough to the west of London. Sixth form students numbered just under 140. Its 1173 students came from a wide range of economic and ethnic backgrounds with an above average number eligible for free school meals. Almost half of the students came from families where English was not their first language and a small proportion of students were in the early stages of learning English. The overall number of students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties, particularly those with cognitive and learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional needs, was very high. The number of students with a statement of special educational needs was similar to the national average. The school was designated as a DfES Sports Hub and was the borough's Specialist Resource Provision for students with physical difficulties and disabilities. The school was a recipient of a number of awards including the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	286
CVA	975
Ofsted	4
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.36
FSM%	25

S8

S8 was an average sized co-educational comprehensive school with 1040 on roll. It was a voluntary controlled, Church of England school that had its origins in a partnership between the Church of England, the neighbouring university and the local authority. The school opened with Fresh Start funding in 2002. The school was situated in the north east of England where there were some areas of acute deprivation. Almost half of the students were entitled to free school meals. Over a third of all the students, including those in the sixth form (110), had special educational needs. It had a lower than average proportion of both students from minority ethnic groups and students whose first language was believed not to be English. The college was awarded Specialist College status in Business and Enterprise in 2006. The college was a Beacon School for Enterprise and held Investors in People status, Sportsmark and Artsmark awards.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	265
CVA	995
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.34
FSM%	46

S9

School S9 served an urban area that was more socially and economically advantaged than most others, but with some pockets of relative deprivation. The proportion of adults in the area with experience of higher education was below average. This 11–16 mixed school, with 960 on roll, had specialist status in Technology and Languages. It also had Leading Edge status, and was the lead school in the borough's Beacon Partnership, providing teacher training under the Graduate Training Programme. The vast majority of pupils were from White British backgrounds and none were at an early stage of learning the English language. A small number of pupils were in care and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was below the national average.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	457
CVA	1009
Ofsted	1
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.09
FSM%	3

S10

S10, which was a large 11-19 community school with over 1500 students on roll, was a fully comprehensive school with a rapidly expanding sixth form (currently 330). The students' attainment on entry was broadly in line with national averages, although this represented a wide range of abilities. The school was a specialist Language, and Business and Enterprise College with an applied learning specialism. The students came from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds. Almost 50% of students

came from minority ethnic heritages and approximately 30% spoke at least one of 51 different languages at home. However, few of the students were at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of those with a learning difficulty and/or disability was below that found nationally and the two main groups identified by the school were those with a moderate learning difficulty and those with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). The number of students eligible for free school meals was about average.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	373
CVA	982
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.23
FSM%	13

S11

With 1330 students on roll, this combined school and sixth-form college was a larger than average 11–18 foundation comprehensive school. A third of the 267 students in the sixth form joined the school from other local high schools and further afield at the start of Year 12. The school was situated in the north west of England. The students were largely White British and few were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were well below average. The school had held specialist Performing Arts status since 2002.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	323
CVA	971
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	5
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.10
FSM%	5

S12

The school was a mixed 13–18 comprehensive school serving the needs of a market town in a West Midlands shire authority. It had moved into new buildings and became a specialist Arts and Media school in September 2007. Almost all students were of White British heritage and nearly all had English as their first language. The proportion of the 933 students on roll with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was broadly average. The sixth form had 208 students. Since 2007, the school had gained a Sportsmark Award, and a third Artsmark Gold Award.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	344
CVA	993
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	6
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.30
FSM%	19

S13

A foundation school, this 11–18 girls-only school was a smaller than average comprehensive school, serving a town to the west of London where levels of social and economic deprivation were higher than average. Over half the girls came from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest ethnic groups, after White British, were Pakistani and Black African. Whilst a quarter of the 693 students had English as an additional language, only a few girls were at the early stages of learning English. The proportion identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was below average, whilst the proportion of those with statements of special educational needs was about average. The school catered for students with specific and moderate learning difficulties as well as those who had emotional and behavioural difficulties. There were partnership arrangements with a neighbouring grammar school and university. The school, which had almost 70 in the sixth form, was awarded specialist status in Business and Enterprise in 2007. It was also an Investor in People.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	363
CVA	1021
Ofsted	3
Governance quality	
Ofsted	2
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	0.11
FSM%	52

S14

The students attending S14 were aged between 11 and 16. It was a mixed community school catering for 820 students and was in the top 10% in the country for the value added to their academic achievement. It was an average size school in an urban area of very challenging social and economic circumstances in the north west of England. It took students from 30 different schools in the area. The proportion of students – nearly all of whom were of White British heritage – entitled to free school meals was very high. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was well above the national average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs was average. The school, which had been a Specialist Sports College since 2001, had gained Investors in People status, as well as the International Schools and Healthy Schools awards. Plans were under way to change the school into an Academy.

Educational attainment	
Raw score	26
CVA	1021.4
Ofsted	2
Governance quality	
Ofsted	3
Survey data	7
Socio-economic status	
IDACI	N/A
FSM%	52

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CfBT Education Trust
60 Queens Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 4BS

+44 (0) 118 902 1000
www.cfbt.com

© CfBT 2010 ISBN 978-1-907496-33-2